

what's Left Afterwards  
Selected Poems by Louis A. Renza

For Crista  
without whom I and mine were not  
For Bob Drennan, Robert Colucci, Jack Morgan  
Inspirers, Friends and  
each one a special reader of Life and Literature  
For Jed Dobson, Colleague and Helpmate  
  
and  
For Alex and Nicholas  
my niece and grandson

## Preface

Except for the first ten poems, I wrote the rest after I retired from teaching at Dartmouth College in 2010.

Eight of the poems here collected have appeared in the online poetry journals Bloodroots and The American Journal of Poetry

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## The wraith

I was thrown out of heaven  
in the summer of 1965  
I think it was before  
I heard the Desolation song that August  
I got the word  
No tumbling this time--just descent

So I came zig-zagging to here  
where now it's all around  
After how many faces  
the smooth legs, the astounding foot  
the hot, swinging lilies  
it comes to today: this thought . . . that cloud

It doesn't matter  
what happened, happened, although  
it was a she  
I thought at the time it was a gold metonym  
for the final no-need-for-more  
for instance to see the tree a thousand green

Get your spine stiff  
Prepare to leave the planet  
Does what becomes of light afterwards  
explain the eventual  
invisible minutiae in the woman's eyes  
haunted by the second guess

I won't miss how  
she used to play her breath  
having looked for God  
So what if she dropped me down  
and then the mute smoke around my arms  
in the darker, later years

### Jealousy in Laguna

There were days ahead I knew  
I would want to hold down  
her curve of energy.  
We lived near the bluest ocean  
west of being young.  
The problem was I couldn't accept  
the exciting script.  
I was like a tree in a wood,  
or a green fish,  
or like a common sage you  
would never notice.  
You might find, under my hood,  
a few violent words,  
but only if you looked hard  
the next day.

### Divorce Day in New Hampshire

I had to have two witnesses for  
the text on the table in case I wasn't  
who I was. They had to testify  
that it correctly summarized my failure to  
move back east and hold her forever.  
The court was cool inside where I signed  
the papers. Of all times, it was  
May. A berserk spell of heat and two animals  
in some past New York scene  
had landed me here. Now I needed  
lawful friends to swear I was as common  
and numb as a deciduous shrub  
unable yet to grow back  
in some promised, warmer spring.

### Visitation Rights (1973)

This way is the way, a clean, almost empty  
 Rest Area. The cars traveling in the yellow heat  
 need rest. They'll wind down  
 unless their bodies can cool off from the constant  
 prod of American masters in knitted plaid.  
 I've seen autos in other times come across as people,  
 my father's '48 Buick, for example,  
 with its grilled smile and white-walled feet.  
 You can think them animals, too:  
 one opens its jaws to drink water and  
 cool its fever; another looks half-blind  
 from all the bugs, random meteors  
 turned green splat against a glass text.  
 It all has something to do with  
 the history of metal women.

But now, most of them just relax,  
 exhausted and even dead like indifferent stones.  
 People pour out of them  
 to eat, sweat, break wind, then go back quickly  
 to their shiny ends.  
 One of them moves away from me, a neuter,  
 a disguise over fixed friction.  
 No doubt he wants to arrive at somewhere else  
 besides a common dream.  
 Everyone's leaving for the right vacation,  
 using gasoline to move toward birth,  
 the dream of roads.  
 I look at it differently. This is no place  
 to break down. I watch a few birds  
 dart across the sky like forgotten scars.  
 I'll finish my apple and toss it in the trash-can  
 before I leave.  
 Why criticize? This is a place of rest.  
 So shut off my animal.

But then a space without roads  
 takes over my sight (windshield or no)  
 and I almost see how as a child  
 he used to eat red fruit to the rind  
 before running outside to find  
 a different summer from  
 the one somehow whirling now inside  
 my latest noon.

## Advice

I tell myself  
don't depend on rhyme.  
Now and then park in a wild place  
and have a snooze.

Replacing art with dreams,  
Freud invented a new health, yet the space  
between God's finger and  
Adam in Creation defines the point of mind  
we can never find.

Thus, memory and action deceive,  
tempting us to think things can end.  
They all go flush and last  
until, one might say, "until" dissolves.

Thus, too, for no reason  
the other day, walking in traffic,  
I heard a shush of wings  
in the air as it turned silent.

Another time, a bold girl  
came into my office in a year of pain.  
Then it rolled over,  
although nothing happened except  
her fresh face.

## Slumming

what could I do, her bracelets off,  
I wanted her lust for its move  
of fine irrelevance,  
then the segue to a later quiet.  
Of course, I already knew  
she preferred expensive windows,  
a European trousseau,  
fond dinners under cameo lights that  
best transpired after visits  
to some museum or two. Had I  
already agreed to become a marbled beau  
shined with dust?

## Reminiscence II

Miles later  
possibly in this restaurant's next room  
(I like to think the color of wood)  
much as years ago, in fact  
someone like her dines with someone else  
warding off voids again  
She used to ask, "Do you feel good"  
in a light way  
Now no doubt she's circled back near  
the start with another smile  
and perhaps a new mind

But in this far long-after year, for me  
it's February, the snow's become  
tiresome white with skins of ice and  
I've forgotten how to be well  
Northern birds hunt for spring smells  
and my bones vaguely inch toward a vacant south  
why do I still recall her  
hiding tremors of indifference years ago  
when I watched her  
swing out of dusk into that night  
with no firelight to come

A Birthday (1996)  
(for Alexandra)

when I feel bone along my jaw  
a half-century along  
or around that time, I know I'm doomed.  
I see the hardwood log like me,  
but does it cringe in  
below winter weather, the sun playing hard-ass?  
I want the resurrection  
to be true, and I put away my cold tools.  
But I feel the cut breeze on days  
when a few deer again appear and hunt for  
unusual hints of a green food.  
I let my dog, dying, go out, and see him  
shiver at midnight.  
My niece, years from now,  
I hope she finds some newer fur to  
help her through the different freeze to come.

## Someone

He went here, there, everywhere,  
always headed somewhere.  
He was always set to go somewhere,

We never knew where or  
knew if he knew.  
Does it matter we would never know?

He was always going elsewhere,  
more than most.  
Many of us want that permanent tree,

to be on a blue perch or something.  
But what if, sometime, we, too, want to  
go astray? In that case, he was

like the air with fine smoke, close  
to us; or to those fast birds  
we think we see flying quickened under rain;

or for something that exists nowhere else  
except somehow inside us, and  
that we keep missing again and again.

## Lucille?

I recall her black dress,  
 a black headband or a veiled hat.  
 They were dancing,  
 likely at some wedding.  
 were the lights low?  
 The whirling on the dance-floor,  
 band-music drove them round,  
 then the stomp of women's heels.  
 She had a nice face, posed after finales.  
 She wasn't my mother.  
 It was during the 1940s.  
 I was five or six.  
 She would be dead by now.

why should I remember her above all  
 out of that era of black cars?  
 People walked casually down summer avenues.  
 In evenings, I'm sure  
 some prayed for the power of prayer.  
 When the streetlamps came on,  
 others surely clenched near trees and  
 went at it like bandits in grief  
 for the duration of a tense, brief Oh.  
 Sometime later, lying vague and numb in rooms  
 under soft orange lights,  
 they must have wondered whether  
 their now gone dance could tide them over.

### An Old Poet Friend

I should have found you in a book before this.  
Your verse was always smooth,  
even then a fine liquor in a brown wooden bar.  
Sure, we were young,  
under the influence of grim poets,  
them with the right words.  
Holy men left us speechless left and right.  
They required thoughts on racks  
of real life, not the dreamed women,  
our succor against gloom that  
pinned us to a dark dash.  
We walked streets, never really knowing to  
where. I mean what  
were the odds for us to pen  
then let alone now  
the crammed contradictions of desire?

## Damascus II

People on the street  
maybe suddenly struck by the thought  
that they might be people  
in the summer air

what do they do now  
that they know they might be  
holy ghosts  
heading nowhere

## Vocation

I'm not like them  
their murmur of heat lightning  
prophets that talk in their sleep

The slide from silver defines my way  
I ask to be taken down  
a pretend buddha

It's the face that matters in mornings  
grooves in the spent other  
her plain lips, nothing afire

Yet near sleep some nights  
there's a hard, blue light  
some gods still slicing through

# Highschool Senior English

(For Mrs. Windsor)

It began with her straight Buddhist face  
 and the rotund chest in class with  
 her mused advice to  
 young worders to read and write for real  
 "Burn both ends of the stick  
 Ride the lopsided swell  
 Heed detours toward a main rose"  
 She was a widow touching  
 the opposite of rote  
 Her first care was to move us to  
 the oblique mad of words  
 what could they say in cellars of mind

I listened with a sanitized will  
 soon wanting to hawk the world with words  
 alert but dressed only in  
 a stored coat, unready to search for  
 the precisions of to-think

Years later, on the way back  
 from age to here  
 (these indefinite lands)  
 I sometimes sense her straying through  
 the wish of my last sentence

So what if she's become another queen  
 topped over by this year's grass  
 or the malfeasance of a passing birds  
 I myself get tired from  
 guarding my breezy balloons  
 and desserts of speech made for show after  
 dinner when everyone has had enough

Like her, the important people I crossed  
 have fallen out or gone to seed  
 She knew the choice was grim. Best to  
 praise a strain of brass that  
 has not yet turned to bleak verdigris  
 I therefore prefer to imagine

her voice with a late delphic twist  
“Seek a country composed of all strangers  
where no one speaks of what  
Pound once thought to rebut, viz.  
‘words like . . . locust-shells, moved by  
no inner being’”

It’s hard to forget abstract hallways that I  
once sought with zeal and instead  
recall those fey whims  
when the phrases just snapped off fast with  
the uncertainty of  
stiff norms breaking apart in the slow  
gargantuan fall she told of  
the one that leads to the enthralls of art

## Missing

He always carried a volume,  
both of them disheveled and all,  
even when the topic  
was something else, such as wood-  
working in the snow.  
Years after school, I almost forgot how

he thumbed that book by Thoreau,  
then disappeared, I don't know to where,  
likely to some monotone,  
surely not to the royal woods that  
he thought would answer.  
My electric keys can't find him now.

Still, I like to think he came to write  
the trite, important poem,  
or wore a green cassock under trees,  
or shuffled in philosophic waft  
and at night drank a startling white gin.  
Maybe one evening,

breaking bread with solitude,  
he heard the Thing with fine fins rush by,  
or told a woman he cared for  
about blue-wine finches,  
how they congregated lauding zero  
outside his apartment window.

### Late for My 55th Reunion

we like to think we haven't changed that much,  
 but to outside smarts  
 (I mean the kids out there who  
 roam the skies with electric calls and  
 light instagrams of touch)  
 we might as well no longer shuffle thoughts,  
 certainly not those of x to y.  
 I'm amazed they finally move at all--  
 take the ones I feel that now just stalled.  
 And what do we make of our  
 stunned stares at old friends, or later  
 the wisdom they once proposed to preach?

There was a moment's fume when I just  
 might have said hello to these fellow peers.  
 I knew them years ago, after all.  
 Take her across the room, didn't we date,  
 or was it chat with an intense forgotten strain?  
 Perhaps we even complained about  
 eruptions in outside affairs or, was it, inside  
 our talk somewhere. And didn't we once  
 try not to quake at cues of  
 sex, the moves that could have led to  
 unknown roads? We were who we are when we  
 didn't know for how much to ask.

In this later crowd, I mostly see  
 the tired gaze that makes me want to flee.  
 Please block their spiels about  
 their immortal young. From what campus  
 won't they too turn out  
 strange poseurs of the real?  
 If none of us can quite deny our own  
 feigned days of sainthood, can't we at least  
 hint at coming griefs? And let's  
 not plan to visit any more famous parks or  
 tour European fiefs. How many more springs  
 will it take to believe we lived?

## Father's Day

Sometimes we got up  
 to go trolling on the early lake  
 for whatever was below  
 The motor putted away, the line hugged  
 the surface, no one in the boat but us  
 I was a boy who thought  
 that thought was less than the pull  
 of god knows what, maybe the tug in  
 my hands up ahead  
 it would come right after that  
 submerged muscle would eat its mistake

Far older, I compare that event to  
 (of all things) first driving a new car  
 with its dark metal still ungrimed  
 its smell fine in the light of day  
 I can even imagine him in it  
 he whom I once knew, also driven toward  
 his own fragile end  
 In any case, he would have loved  
 the way it goes  
 all its gadgets to prevent the loss  
 of our desires to mix with time

As for today, I clench down quick  
 and ask, speaking of lapses  
 who was he anyway  
 For certain not to be found in any book  
 we shared a few lost words while  
 things flew around us, and  
 no doubt, too, the blind genes inside  
 neither he nor I really owned  
 And what of his hurts before he left  
 for keeps? Did they also lie  
 in the same deep waters

There's no way back to miss what  
 we missed, whether the me of mine or  
 what passed for his  
 The past arrives cold from the north  
 The year says, no  
 we can't fire the world again with subjects

Soon enough we shiver with how we  
just were who we never are  
It's what I failed to catch when the two of us  
floated into one more passing dawn

O. the Magnificent  
(for Don Oas)

In this dead winter  
nothing moves  
except maybe the human toward wrath  
None of it's to do  
with some spectacular, beautiful nothing

I don't see  
why I think of a friend who  
used to paint all sorts of pictures  
even a gouache or two  
some of vacant, soft shirts  
blue ones and so on  
with a blond ghost inside them  
like him  
(I still have one with blank sleeves  
wafting in a washed-out space)  
He would tell me how  
he felt drawn to the Norwegian Munch  
We smoked pipes in those days  
enjoyed despair  
Sometime after, still loyal  
he got smashed in a mess of metal  
and missed his death while  
sleeping in a dream

Nothing is here  
no hint of the strange familiar  
his face a passing thought, for example  
or how he went  
Outside, a quiet animal  
looks for a missing leaf, anything  
a beam of light  
that isn't snow

As far as I can see  
he knew way beforehand  
there's just the straight quanta  
that reproduce trees  
and stop us cold on our path

Experts say dark matter, after all  
inhabits most of this place  
although who can be sure  
Maybe it's where  
the dead go before they fade

like bits of gloom  
then slide down the common sluice in  
a final suffix of grace  
I too am coming to when  
there's no shade to see

Always we should have had at least  
one more late summer  
somewhere where apples fall, with  
our smoke caught  
in the updraft of melancholy

### Strange Stroke at Seventy

Somewhere something happened,  
 some said in the Mojave of my mind  
 or like sunspots  
 where nothing really happens anyway.  
 Things only darkened in "an unimportant part"  
 although maybe also where a few lords  
 are still said to sleep.  
 I got these brainstorm, you see.  
 The doctors thought them internal signs  
 of how I might not make a puppet speak.  
 Others said they would prevent me  
 from feeling trees after the steep, dear snows.

And worse, I would miss  
 how a woman might twirl soft pieces  
 of the possible.  
 Like others, I want to murmur into warmth  
 on the way down,  
 still touch her spine, say, and  
 not find it mere skeleton, a harder  
 indestructible naught.  
 Otherwise it would be like sighting  
 foul dots each day  
 pecking in fields across the way  
 just to gawk at the human.

Such as I was, I'm now far from  
 hectic worries about the daily, blue economy  
 or how eyes soon won't perform.  
 One day surely comes the secret flash  
 of self just missed.  
 So I'm bound to ask, where is  
 the latest promise to improve lights  
 to come from?  
 The world's about the smell  
 of paradise that got burned down  
 even before I noticed,  
 and so itself, what else, a mere stroke of luck.

## Resurrections

I read somewhere that Ezekiel said  
 that someday our past bones  
 will gather flesh again, and Lo  
 only the smooth brow afterwards,  
 no stumped, short selves this time around.

But what then?  
 Not to sleep, no more days,  
 no passing of friends into the brush,  
 their fading sounds made of trombone?

Of course, it could be worse.  
 Take Prof. C, for example.  
 He was a college philosopher way back when,  
 always proper, dressed up.  
 He stared at sunsets, wore a fedora,  
 thought serious thoughts next to the rocks.  
 We read his pamphlet defining truth,  
 but now his name's forgotten  
 by tons of new shadows.

What did he do with the slack, banal wind  
 For sure he felt it near  
 his collar on certain days when  
 there was no shock of the profound around.  
 Could his return help?

### Elegy for a Mother

I pick up this and that here and there,  
 read in Ecclesiastes, say,  
 or from poets who swim in a nearby river  
 to explain why  
 she, through whom I became one,  
 has become no one, which  
 I suppose for her was to accept God's largesse.

How can that be?  
 Now I have no one to tell me  
 where I was, or if I was just someone  
 who called himself me all my life.  
 She's not there to announce  
 or to insist I am, no matter the year.  
 It was always her time, I see,  
 not mine to say.

still, I repeat her myth of me  
 in a thousand pieces.  
 For instance, I'm playing  
 in some past kitchen with a blue floor,  
 her hum in the background,  
 her doing something, no doubt, to make me  
 a famous rock of ages.

She would hurt that it never worked.  
 I'm just a small thing  
 hurtling toward the sun just  
 to become, soon enough, no one, like her.  
 why does it matter that  
 she once meant it to be more?

## A Piano Finale

Just after Goode's concert ended  
the crowds crowded out  
I felt the black air around us  
the fading of a dead friend's image  
his once intact face  
he who liked such events

Our conversations that went on and on  
in some dim yet ebullient zone  
start to leave me as I  
hunt for my car in a thin October rain  
My wife leads the way  
as I wonder where they can be

# Airport Blues

This is me, I think  
 staring at the long hall in de Gaulle  
 red floors for miles  
 wondering if there's space enough  
 to contain my wrath  
 at the star, at ravens, at what all  
 we missed our flight and so we wait

I ask what's next  
 (If any angels persist after  
 gothic holocausts that scoured religion  
 I wonder if the abyss below their wings  
 has the same rough edge as mine)  
 Still, inside I plead like a fly found  
 in a late fall warm

We too are sluggish enough to keep going  
 you know, as if summer will reappear and shock  
 the system, oh just once more  
 (why give up the garden  
 except that then there's pain again)  
 In any case, by now I don't want to fly  
 we build monuments around space

We shorten its stride and (never mind time)  
 deny the cold chemistry of its dasein  
 I myself prefer ground  
 we live in a place where there's still  
 a clean river and trees that ache with green size  
 and where the air announces winds--  
 if we could only get back there

### A Minor Squawk

I try to make meaning inside my room  
Later I go out  
and bring in the wood  
This year, it's gotten heavier  
as the air thins  
and the sun goes farther south

More so than ever, all this happens  
after the tight, intimate games indoors  
years of keeping the body hidden  
from the chilling views

## A Berryman Homage

## 1

what do they mean  
 the stares of cyber acronyms  
 rushed info, all meant to quicken the mind  
 for some scene abroad  
 A whitened sun spreads around our cities  
 Even nothing goes to waste

A hard history of metal runs me down  
 It claims, It's mystery's reborn  
 although in winter I seldom dream anymore  
 I no longer look for real theatrics  
 the supposed thaw of spring  
 the human stuff just coming out of mud

You can wait all you want for  
 the promised blow-out of pain  
 but you can bet it won't come any time soon  
 Only once, in an absolute June  
 could I just about say  
 it was more than that the rain had begun

## 2

I try to turn elsewhere  
 For example, I brush wings with Berryman  
 but there's no go there  
 I only touch the rigor of missed sense  
 now and then lunge against  
 syntax abruptly fading to sound

They say his dreams appeared  
 on the brink of finally becoming song  
 I follow him into wordy groves to see  
 if I can see where he went, but  
 all I find is a breviary in shorthand  
 and yes, it's about a woman

I'm no slouch about that mood either  
 although not the same, for example his in  
 a forgotten, strange New England  
 where his Mistress exchanged

finite lungs for the judder of finitude  
He says he almost heard her bless the nights

She burned scribbles on wood under empty skies  
Now and then, she wore cold feathers  
walked in a blue forest that evening, there  
to feel a sudden dear shudder  
After taking flight, she accepted berries until  
afterwards she crested in the gloom

## 3

I'd like to be headed there too  
so I press myself to look under his words  
But a surceased self, he's gone  
Is there a shrine somewhere to visit his brains  
At most, his image is crammed with dancing dots  
a flawed photo of a good pal

As for his words, I assume  
their clue is her, not Henry, his beefy dupe  
rather the imagined, besotted wife who  
at last listens to his stuttered hints of soul  
For that, she lets him almost speak  
in a fine, antique sound

Behind the scratched glass  
she holds him tight, a kind of husband  
in a darkened room where she starts his fire  
I figure it's like when  
I sometimes look out toward the woods  
and know my vocation without any clouds around

## 4

On occasion, his words still riddle  
my world rife with the trick of distance  
Then he's someone speaking as  
on a flawless day in Scotland when you hear  
strange sayings, such as that  
trees exist or sweeps of flowers aren't enough

His stories most resemble a past filled with  
sand  
I cling to them, they rush me  
through a lapsing twilight in alleyways  
leading nowhere, almost the way conjunctions  
can sometimes frame  
the magnificence of adjacent nouns

But mostly he's gone  
 Often enough, he too dreamt in solo  
 how one stumbles into images of a ruined self  
 a former future tense, losses  
 of the one one, or of friends, the ones  
 finally turned to ghosts--

they exist in the midst of a terrible haze  
 where do they go  
 all the right conversations under stars  
 what can our new machines do about human scars  
 with us no longer young and when  
 no spouse comes by like an Anne Bradstreet

## 5

He at least left her behind, wrapped in  
 laced thoughts of a world seen from deep space  
 As for me, too late I ask myself about  
 how many poems I didn't write  
 How did I miss the concentrate of hurt  
 a liquor inert, which my mind like his

was quick to want  
 then hold with my normal hands tensed  
 until they just might have roamed  
 their way into odd, unexpected tropes  
 Instead, mine are shifting tea-leaves  
 Late or not, I copy them down

I go with soft turns of metaphors in water  
 I think up phrases to  
 think what I might have written  
 Is it enough to leave behind  
 what I term mere meditations that  
 settle down in the rough green as I pass by

Is love always primed for the certain descent  
 Even so, I mean to write what I can  
 darken my noon shadow so to glimpse  
 where I become a body bending in unknown light  
 I try to record things seen sideways  
 as on a new New England day

Not least, I must speak up for  
 myself when no one's there and I feel  
 a force through my arms aimed at a blank page  
 we all of us have got in us somewhere  
 an invisible, gorgeous horse  
 leading us toward the deaden seas

Forgetting S.W.  
--d. 2010

Long, a lithe reed  
splendid speed when young  
a tight end  
that boy lost his mind  
never won anything at the end  
Oh yes, maybe he had two  
or three children along the way  
knew where he wanted to go  
I don't know  
Back then, we only spoke in passing  
I'm sure he seldom pondered  
what could the poetic do  
His wife sure put up with a handsome lout  
He was a doctor who always  
wanted to be a doctor  
He had no patience with certain thoughts  
never one to doubt  
for instance such as asking  
why here, why this  
So why should I ask them instead  
since his mind went dead  
Maybe the last thing he saw  
when he could still almost name himself  
were green bits on sticks that  
somehow came tall out of the ground  
And I imagine that  
perhaps he wondered a little  
if the sun was a sign or a trace  
or whether he was really someone  
And did he at last ask  
what had the sky to do with it all

## Belonging

Always comes this voice that says  
     Select your robe for synagogue or church  
 or choose to wear monastic wool  
     My choice, though, avoids chanting  
 no vows to the long prose of fogged songs

It hurts, such refined doom  
     but I swear to resist the symbolics of  
 the downfall of the moon  
     You could say it's not enough to hear  
 the world in holy tones

    Better but to inch toward  
 the nether psalm, a transformation to sod  
     yet in which I become like a bittern  
 seen strange in the light from snow

From there, there's no place to go  
     just an odd scene or two  
 and trudge ahead, ready to know how  
     I flit by in a hot haze  
 exiled from things; a little piece breaks  
     apart as soon as whatever  
 makes the wind blow hard  
     from directions of opaque stuff  
 finally from the skies

I feel rushed to ask  
     why, after contentment  
 does despair quicken every time  
     (and why, please,  
 does it have leather skin)  
     or why doesn't the grass stay green  
 with atomic insects afoot

Therefore I stand up and hold out for  
     cargoes of words  
 at least to wrap my wife in furs  
     and walk away smoothed to debonair  
 so what if I spell life backwards  
     hence recite the wrong beatitudes  
 believe in death after life, don't wait for

saints without sin, whom every  
dawn I'd rather reduce to the slough of awe

with believers in non-belief

I own no books about how to die  
no one to spell me in the dark disquietude as

I trail off to disappear

At times, a calamitous moll comes close

not coordinate with swifts

but more like singularly mean geese

forcing me out of sight

in the grim excitement of a planned con

## Prophecy circa 1953

The last time I was Isaiah  
I was ten.  
Going to bed, I shuddered in evenings  
at the device from space  
that would land on the vacant lot  
across the street.  
I was sure it would hold the Thing from the movie,  
a Satan made of plants  
somehow released from a blinding Arctic snow.  
Now I see that the event  
already reminded me of Frost's vacant places.  
I saw the I of me  
turning inside a bubble where  
there were no more lights by which  
to see famous phenomena.

### Leaf Season

People come to north New England  
to see the leaves  
to watch the greens shed to yellow  
and maybe for a time to stop  
the roar of life's suffering  
does anyone really know

It's everywhere, though  
South of here where I lived early on  
people paid the price  
for insurance and ordered order  
After years of this and that crisis  
in a life of small potatoes  
the best I could have said for Hartford  
was that it prepared the day  
when all of us would walk straight and  
and then dry up. For example  
people chanted in churches and synagogues  
According to different sunsets  
they moved together in the lush wish  
to ensure suburban dinners

I listened to it for the longest time  
until later, in secret  
I wanted to hack away at trees  
tremble in earnest  
get beyond doggerel meditations  
at least to read something that would  
mash me enough to see things  
apart from smoldering residues of self

If I am but don't have to be  
and need never have been  
doesn't everything  
including dreams, such as  
forced by that city  
curve back into a present  
where I can still imagine  
walking streets at evening before  
sleep, myself quickened by  
the once common smell of fired leaves

## The End of the Road

Near Barker Street in 1940s Hartford  
 I once saw a stray chicken from  
 Mr. Knapp's poultry abattoir  
 Sometimes you could hear  
 the clucking & yelping from a block away  
 also between the noisy, slow stutters of  
 city buses burping smoke  
 corner to corner  
 There was little style to any of it  
 not even like Joe Fortee's  
 A garbage-man with no Errol Flynn looks,  
 He sought applause from us after work at  
 the corner drugstore, all  
 cologned & ready, he claimed  
 for fantastical babes like  
 the ones boys with doped-up mufflers  
 kept driving for  
 back & forth, up & down the avenue  
 If you asked him, he could tell you that  
 like the nuns  
 he believed in the 12th Pius & also  
 knelt down on Sundays  
 He would huff & puff his bulk, but thought  
 he could move fast  
 & claimed he had poetic prowess  
 & all the lithe grace of a boxing pro  
 (Those were the days  
 long before Ali when  
 you might accidentally bump into  
 a puffy-eyed willie Pep &  
 his entourage uptown on Asylum Avenue  
 walking off a hangover  
 no doubt after a night just ended with  
 floozy babes, etc.)  
 Then there was Pluggy A., he wore a green  
 uniform (was he a plumber?)  
 always quick, on the go  
 an energy bunny before its time  
 On the other corner  
 was Cheech's bookie joint, and you  
 might also see someone else passing by  
 who'd gone to college and would walk to Mass  
 just up the street  
 holding his missal next to his breast  
 years before later  
 he took to suicide  
 And oh yes, near Chick Berman's store  
 you could almost hear

the boredom, what with the heavy  
 summer trees that back then  
 still grew deep green on  
 Franklin Ave. (a name that should've meant  
 "free way" but never did  
 instead leading us to whatever  
 sagged us down)  
 what became of Dorman's Hardware store  
 its owner's sales-son  
 privately reading Thomas Mann on the side  
 or Doc D. who praised Scott F.  
 & couldn't leave the Twenties  
 & endless thoughts of Gatsby parties  
 But mostly in our summers  
 women in aprons sat on stone stoops of  
 3-story apartment flats with  
 everybody watching everybody else in  
 claustrophobic arguments  
 In those days, so-called wops, Micks, Polocks  
 or the occasional stray Black  
 walked up and down the avenue  
 often on heated days, each one somehow  
 headed in the wrong direction  
 Before television, there was always  
 the Lincoln Dairy, too  
 it was farther south and pretty close to  
 the city's baseball stadium  
 But we seldom walked that far to  
 eat in that cold, white palace, a clean  
 steel-shined place that  
 warned me ahead of time of ice-cream headaches.  
 I don't know why we  
 mostly didn't go there, especially when  
 winter came & barred us from all  
 the minor games with  
 their crisp sound of hits  
 But to this day, I think that was a mistake  
 we should've gone on through  
 crashed the cold gate  
 & waited for an important season to return  
 It would've been the same as  
 finding new lakes with sheets of wind with  
 special visions that would  
 riffle your hair & make you feel free at last  
 (to borrow a phrase)

## Retirement

I planned on coming back  
but the hills and gray fogs  
got to be too much  
I knew enough not to write about it  
at least not while wearing mink gloves

At first there were ways  
to live breathless among the trees  
but soon enough  
no one talked about the browned ferns  
already the shit of summer  
the what of leftover lusts  
all the deceptions that  
marked the singular burn-out of self

Today people I used to know  
have light hands, pared down every hour as  
the sun comes near  
My wife sits by my side at a concert  
and after thirty years  
I still don't know who she is  
We come down to mysterious bones and faces  
Joys at sound seem miles away  
and then there's the sad, late loss of  
the quickening aperçu

who am I coming not to be  
what if I just wait  
for the snows to whiten outside in  
their general sprawl  
Am I already organs on the cold table  
remnants of an ex-something  
their sources in some ancient fish and  
before that, the clouds

There's no way out except  
maybe over there in the mist  
where a mite finch flows down from air  
alone in its excellence  
(but can we really tell from here)  
it all reminds me of how hard it is to  
piece the puzzle back  
into our bodies that once rose at noon

Like anyone, I want  
to live again in an infinite year  
driven by the wish for enigma  
and not to miss her intoxicant breath,  
felt far from any museum

### The Dance Master

He wore glasses  
 and a gray suit that shined  
 anyway formal to the hilt  
 He was shortish, too  
 his face went to the rosy hue  
 (doubtless he sipped  
 the rye highball some nights)  
 and with his wife  
 he taught ballroom to us once a week  
 always wearing the black  
 patent-leather foot  
 He looked happy as he showed us how  
 all the while  
 chatting in slow-motion trot  
 the skip and hop of a behind  
 really a hoot  
 we laughed at his directives  
 (not to his face, though)  
 He believed it all  
 just as in God (he taught near a church)  
 His wife, I recall  
 would smile a lot, don a nod

1-2-3, a 1-2-3--when  
 we were young  
 it was almost easy to sense it  
 as a fey locution  
 a slide toward salvation  
 dance as the foreplay to  
 the real foreplay  
 we thought far more something  
 was sure to come  
 the dropped chemise, say  
 the shudder near a warm hand  
 if only we could learn  
 how to glide over wood  
 The object was to nix our legs  
 avoid their heavy sand  
 and maybe finally breathe in sync  
 float up, put down our hoods  
 get with it  
 in short, be made to flow  
 and think in sound  
 come upon something like a scene  
 of pleasant blue

Thus, it would all turn true  
that there was a way  
to shiver nice inside of noons  
or notice an orange god or two  
washing ashore, bored  
at last from weird flights  
around the skies and  
ready to repeat immortal tunes . . .  
But then, what  
of later friends racked by vertigo  
taking a last glance at what  
now seem old feasts  
who fare like tense, reduced beasts  
that cling to trees  
He was almost right, then  
in his small way  
we needed help from the waltz to live under  
transparent lights, always  
two people moving in sinuate ease in  
an entirely new space filled with  
glassy notes, only a few rules  
and no voices leading us into hidden holes

## A wife's Tannenbaum

C's going crazy making cookies  
 It's the season  
 There'll be sauces plus red smells in  
 our ornamented rooms  
 We got a tree, but she didn't like  
 how I rushed things when  
 we bought it  
 Every year I forget how it's all  
 got to get done  
 We're families hunched against  
 the dark and colder dawns to come  
 But this is just one tree  
 there's no need to worry, I protest  
 we'll buy another next year  
 there are so many to replace it  
 even if we don't look hard  
 other pines will hardly be the same

We decorated it anyway  
 At night it looks plenty tame to me  
 although I notice she treats it  
 a little like an orphan  
 Yet I tell her that it almost  
 lights up the chaos  
 not unlike the trees of former years  
 when she demurs, I tell her again  
 that we live a good life  
 Although we never had nativities of  
 our own to show them a tree on  
 some make-believe Christmas while  
 it snowed outside  
 we also never had to say  
 No more cookies now, and keep  
 low to the ground  
 Don't let sky-things get you down

## March Thoroughfare

Outside it's raw, uncooked  
 the wind sharp, not for sweet fools  
 There's no hint of seaweed  
 near our cold spring woods  
 Some of us thought (including  
 those inside me) that  
 it could really be as it was before  
 We might meet once more  
 hearing divine slang on  
 summer streets, in fact even  
 right after today  
 Then we could slosh into dim places  
 where you wouldn't find  
 one single "book of the dead"

“

But I can already tell it's no go  
 For one thing  
 the young now prefer thin  
 parchment thoughts to poetic scrolls as  
 they think their faces  
 won't ever change in the ways  
 ours did since last night

where to go in this mad air and  
 with my image in the glass as I walk by  
 feeling lashed with brine and  
 having raced for one too many havens  
 what is this thing that  
 still takes my place, moves  
 with lessened arms and eyes  
 and, worse, watches scoundrels pass by  
 who will inherit the earth

## Spring Fever

we went to the greenhouse to find  
some plants and blooms  
She wanted to paste them in the ground  
have them spring up like stunned kites  
I didn't know what to look for  
a few reds and whites  
I didn't care  
The peonies or whatever would grow  
and stand out in fright  
Every year I'd see them  
becoming startling bold  
sudden annunciations soon after  
the snows left  
But that would be it  
Later, repeated springs would  
take them down, palled  
by the annual storms of second sight

## Party Time

This place has thinned out,  
fewer of us around.  
There had been a crowd,  
a maze of chatter blaring in rooms,  
and here and there  
hints of the exceptional liaison. But  
then seasons for fun got stale  
and the sun never changed.

Still, I'm hardly ready to call it quits  
although I realize that  
even for birds, coming down from the sky  
must be hard; here below, doors  
that seldom opened have now  
shut tight; and I never understood iron  
before I saw how lost friends  
resembled disguised bollards in the fog.

So I need to take morning bread.  
Maybe later I just might  
get half-drunk, as at an old  
black-tie fling. There I'd make to speak  
in tongues or at least talk fast,  
the better to spread rumors about fantastic  
wings that once might have allowed us  
to try a bolder route.

### Playing with Fire

I strike again, hard and stark.  
 It's that time of year when  
 no more séances will do.  
 There's satisfaction just in the swing.  
 Animals scurry for nuts as  
 I maul wood near the ground near rocks.  
 Sometimes I see sparks.  
 It's important to cut these blocks  
 before the frost and  
 the arrival of no motion.

After all, the constant heavy mist  
 this time of year  
 forces my steps to do a diminuendo,  
 never mind crimps my  
 running down an idea until  
 maybe once I might have reached its pulp.  
 It's easier to split poplar logs  
 one after the other--  
 I like the neat statement,  
 the taming my fear by blunt hits of wood.

Besides, I like how the pile  
 soon looks like a toy bastion from afar.  
 But of course, that's afterwards.  
 Only close up do I slam  
 and pound and slice thick limbs of  
 what amounts to, I think, nothing, like mine.  
 I like that better.  
 It makes all the difference.  
 I'm not too old, no  
 just a little scared of the distant sun.

### Stadium Grass Near Midnight

You can see by the way he walks  
 it's his autumnal flush  
 Time will go before he knows it  
 but for now he swings at air and thrives  
 His body sinks low only when  
 he thinks grim thoughts  
 Sure, at night he wears paraphernalia  
 mouth-guards and the like  
 to protect against random sighs  
 a down-shift in views  
 or the threat of his softened thighs  
 Age does this and that, for instance  
 to once feared sinews of swift  
 In other words, now he wears a beard  
 inside his face that no one notes  
 Yet if a grimace stalks his heart  
 he refuses to tire  
 resists the cliché  
 wants to keep pace  
 go deep always in one more flash of art  
 In that single late evening  
 he would dash for good  
 try to make it home all on his own

### Another Déja Vu

My friend goes up to Aspen every year  
has cocktails in the mountains  
and so muses about the void in December  
or at least early March

I can almost hear his glasses clink  
a sound from afar, what with  
each day's grim grip of snow coming down  
under fertile clouds

But skiing there also sharpens the way  
tracks lose their first lines  
They turn into signs of an endless  
cold ground where nothing can be found

The chatter for signoras thus never quite  
fades, and may also help explain  
for example, why even some  
people in China like Finnegans Wake

For me, not there, I too play for keeps  
I tell myself that  
except for how I take my daily bread  
I always want the nonce

But how many winds happen before they  
strip pine-hard trees back to mere wood and  
skies invade bright walks in Aspen  
won't one then seek the unique perils of shade

Since at bottom, in the town  
the uproar of danger will have passed for  
another year, may my friend  
also soar as he slides down from the high

### Encyclical Reversus

I hear he's not too bad, he cares for the poor,  
 isn't a tough, that  
 he opts for low-temp tropes and  
 claims he respects any self  
 who suffers sad hope or loss of glamour.

still, for us who hum in a different zone  
 (not mistaken for some other world)  
 he's not enough, doesn't get there,  
 even if not someone who's just come on the block  
 and doesn't clamor for goals.

There's no sense getting crazed, although  
 I, for one, don't have the clout to stop sermons.  
 They always find a special cause for  
 scattered creeds or amazed runs mostly to  
 reach reasons for the sky.

In place of investigations of demons or  
 old-hat pique at stray doubts about  
 some old saint, I lean toward the albino poem  
 rinsed with English words and flecked  
 by glints of an immeasurably future Red Dwarf.

Thus, I return to the scarred caves of  
 the big bulls at Lascaux, or fiends prowling  
 grounds with mammoth needs  
 so with no trace of human faces sodden with woe,  
 at most quartets of steeds in flight.

Tomorrow, I have an appointment with winter,  
 but you won't find me mired in pines  
 trying to hear the sough of anointed snow.  
 I want to be like whoever drew whims  
 in clay colors, so not to please popes or men.

Likewise, I see myself walking down a street  
 shot through everywhere in fall shades.  
 They block my thought and, homeless  
 I'm using a nickel cane that allows me time  
 to gaze at the taut knot of holy riddles.

## Snowdrops

I walked out and got a spring cold.  
 Other friends hung around, but  
 I had the scratchy throat and got wobbly  
 when I went to meet them.  
 Except for a poem or two,  
 I couldn't think; even those came with  
 a voice that bars accents of a yes.  
 They could have driven Saxon runes  
 right out of town.

But to swear off strong cantos of glad and  
 try to face ice, I might as well  
 drink bitters straight in some tavern as I  
 dawdle over what's left of sound.  
 It's mostly over, what to say about all  
 the havoc, people twirling dice,  
 running to ground.  
 For what it's worth, I silence up and  
 try to stamp out enticing perplexions.

You think winter's gone out for sure,  
 but a prolonged chill leaves  
 something behind in the wood we burn.  
 Last week I saw a swallow blur  
 while it trailed over a remote, high hill,  
 another gradual redaction of the good.  
 I understand now why sometimes I  
 conjure up suave caballeros  
 riding towards relaxed states of mind.

### Dry Spell

I said, let me in  
 A doorman said, I think not, I can't  
 In my neck of the woods  
 you don't fit  
 You're not among the chantries

It's happened once or twice in  
 your history, yes  
 okay, the soft song, the svelte feat  
 even beacons verbs  
 Now you must suppose that the cruel simple  
 has disturbed your pace

Inside you're made of mere space  
 at most the susurrations such as of people  
 unable to pray in temples  
 And so you're like  
 that perennial, timeless speck  
 Think of that time you heard the snow  
 alone in late spring  
 fizz against a bare window in a tempo  
 not primed for any melt

The like now checks you on  
 your strange path, although not enough  
 to change perambulations that  
 no longer work to controvert grief

It comes to how  
 you can't square anything at all  
 Your shoes don't fit and  
 the average breath just won't do

## School Bells

I hear the gong.  
 Is it that time already for the real quiet.  
 Look, at night I've read Pound,  
 paid my dues, gave him the nod.  
 I admit it: near the end  
 I sense his gust of words, it keeps going,  
 so why not make cadenzas out  
 of lesser stuff than his ancient worlds?

True enough, I never understood his ground,  
 not his long-lost gods nor  
 complaints about Jews who, after all  
 fear the same blank hush as he.  
 Still, I choose to touch his Asian vowels,  
 the reverberative sound,  
 then traverse (not brush off) his recitations of  
 the perceived history of Italian wounds.

Narrative is an interim pleasure before  
 the rage of animals drives us to  
 a strange gospel without the slightest clue.  
 So starts a different story that  
 you stick around to hear.  
 On cue, for instance, something about  
 having veins tells you you're still here  
 but never what to do.

I know you don't believe it.  
 who does on the way out?  
 It's like a blue egret suddenly imaged or  
 just landed in dark waters.  
 It happens somewhere in a descending haze.  
 Does the bird take in  
 the passing day or learn the absence of cure as it  
 grows a heavy wing?

It all spins us into a disturbing trance,  
 a numbed carcass of self.  
 Yes, we too will have to disappear,  
 experience the delirium of proverbial stars,  
 stare at planets, not be calm but  
 get stuck in blows of force,  
 at best close the door and no longer  
 take life with a dose of aplomb.

Short of breath, then  
 churned almost to mere bone, shouldn't I  
 take it on the chin, have class

wait until the next day?  
What can I do to accept this raucous limit  
--wait for the glazier to arrive  
so that I might recall  
my belief in the importance of crystal?

## Last Rites

I can't impress on me enough  
 the utter unimportance of this body  
 laid out, not at all  
 to be compared with some wake-up call  
 for an ice-cream return  
 If anything, it more resembles  
 the cement face  
 the pill-box eyes of the politico  
 who never asks  
 why are the snows coming

I read the caption about who it was  
 for these days I'm not sure of anything  
 Later I attend the event  
 mostly in the nave  
 what with that holy Film-star above us  
 that spreads its long arms  
 from a green and red-ribbed pane  
 I expect It's meant to say, Cross over  
 Nothing to fear

I shouldn't complain  
 I can bear it, I've been here before  
 Still, it stumps me that  
 even in this age of iron biers  
 a corps on stage still wear hieratic robes  
 and dare to mourn  
 what's not at all there  
 even though I admit it's a familiar mask  
 of someone who will likely  
 now and then strafe one of my night dreams

At last, the organ fills my head  
 a woman's voice sings an unrelated hymn  
 Then there's the chalice  
 The garbed father lifts it up  
 holds to a saga I think having less bite  
 than some sport, say golfing  
 through the colored trees in late fall  
 For him the cup comes from and  
 goes back to the skies  
 For me it's turned hard as cold  
 just a flat, thin shine of a metal light  
 ferried across ground

I'm too tired to mock  
 At the grave, I look toward a coppice  
 Morning and then noon return

I wait for their loss  
The eight-gun salute goes off  
and scares a hawk  
I tell myself, don't think about  
the vacancies of space  
In any case, I still won't be  
a glossed wooden face  
dressed in a half-extraneous suit

## Neighbors

In this country  
 if you live in city or town  
 not just in places  
 where you know your place from  
 berries on a fall's bush  
 the skittish deer keep running everywhere  
 especially at evening  
 and then not just across streets  
 but also into storefronts  
 and cars. Anyone living here can  
 do without their relentless, arbitrary dashes  
 weather permitting, they would surely  
 crash into homes too  
 thus make us long for even Canadian geese  
 soaring back from a jazzy south  
 ripe with their droppings  
 as we ponder our own residues of luck

No doubt to most of us  
 their dumb eyes, curiously amok, say nothing  
 Their bucking no doubt derives from  
 long-ago savannahs that helped  
 make their kin, like us, indigenes of fear  
 their diseases immune to  
 their own kind of heaven  
 such as we ourselves depend upon for cures  
 what's left for them afterwards, then  
 except almost dreamt perceptions of sunlight  
 encased as in beads of occidental oil

So they keep coming back  
 with what looks like a special form  
 of vengeance. They gaze at sounds, stunned  
 by a frisson of tunes we never hear  
 They eat everything  
 even lifeless, winter rhododendrons or  
 what we mistake for  
 symptoms of a token resurrection

They themselves sniff at the bare breeze  
 then look for the next blade of food  
 move in concentrations of hunt  
 At best they resemble sullen, inbred brooders  
 just released to an outside world  
 hence toiling for many-manna thoughts  
 minus any mood for shrines  
 who will catch them, since  
 today's hunter, once primed with daily eyes

now watches and waits for signs of  
their flights, but  
only to quench a last-minute thrill  
what must it take to hurt  
cervid cold fur, or otherwise stop the ways  
they instigate the weird? How long  
before they fill the world with motion that  
leaves nothing but hooves of pounding sound

Listening to  
Bob Dylan before the Fall

when you can't hear his sound, he still sings  
He knew when he began  
he would never commit a defined farewell  
Yet he knew when he began that  
he was already at the end

Doubtless some of us have gray hair or none  
so that we hear finales too  
But few of us can admit like him that  
we keep coming back, though  
closer to a complete loss of heat

To compare, he tallies the other side  
the repeating, infinite young  
For him, they don the guise of strange strangers  
who always fail to remark  
the lovely shorthand of the hoarse

Unlike them and without show  
he takes account of the vibration of brothers  
as when regrets vanish in hopes to find  
the source of the face next door  
for who, in the end, can go it alone

That's true today when even fey excitements  
over facts about dragons  
get stuck in repetitions of wax  
Even his English thus becomes a second language  
backed up without a first

At best, vibrant eyes nod kindly towards him  
as he rallies and stays on scene  
I mean, notice the stray, desiccate leaves  
already at thirst on August lawns  
the sure pull of a coming winter hoar

Once he sought awards rife with coins  
In another spring, he glared at suns from a stage  
why today won't he just disappear without a fight  
why persist to wreck former sights  
that he once sent us in an informed rage

I suppose we all go before  
we go all null  
we live almost forever until  
we begin to feel our hands ache at dawn  
Thus bardos have deepened his late few hours

Now we stand up and blare applause while  
he offers couplets in another code  
He registers his days in miles of stares  
but he leaves his voice in graphite songs that  
at last block the investigative gaze

At least compared to other neon odes, his  
chase down flickering signs of gone  
You can hear them until they turn nicely  
imperviously dumb, almost finished  
as with the rustling of browned August ferns

## Puzzles

I had just taken off  
in fact, almost flew  
I could see a lot, especially  
when staring at a sibylline code  
one of the old kind  
that is, a map for the intricate  
anything but the Sunday solution  
I never wanted the polished dull or  
thoughts that kept me from  
losing count  
Best to get lost in the dark surmise  
wasn't that my goal right  
from the start, to wonder how to  
believe in a Trojan horse

## A Poetic Mandate

Stray into metaphor against  
 your will  
 An image might appear  
 say of an elephant or something  
 stranded in your way  
 But you're told early on not  
 to go for big stuff  
 no wisdom at the end. No, if at all  
 stick to what you see, script  
 the right page  
 punctuate quick the god-like bluff  
 Afterwards a yellow cognac  
 might be in order  
 of course if you still don't care to  
 stoke defeats of tact  
 According to words in the local press  
 it's what we do best  
 rehearse the average, daily slight  
 cite the slow warp of stress  
 note only the thin relations to sin of  
 people about to fall apart  
 and always within a dim limelight

### The Granite State

Once I saw Marisa Berenson in a movie  
 her spread of dark hair  
 there was surely fresh mint nearby  
 I thought I saw her truth  
 the soupçon of a smooth back when  
 she must have walked out  
 into the tougher real  
 In those days I felt I wore  
 enough musk to soften  
 any sudden fall back down to earth

Now it's a harder year in  
 everyone's unsteady march  
 Life goes on rough. Nothing chimes  
 and I let words play dice  
 Older, I forget names and yet recall  
 how that itself can lead to mirth  
 Then I notice  
 foreign footprints in the snow  
 and soon my own become  
 one more stain on a ruined pieces of gneiss

Long ago, old neighbors told of  
 their visit to some petrified forest  
 They gave me a minor souvenir from there to  
 show they'd seen things that  
 they must have thought were of the rarest  
 I was young at the time  
 thus believed in the regularity of  
 live things, even the sky  
 Still, I had to wonder why objects became  
 opaque after they mattered

### Atonal Complaint

These are tough times.  
I can't avoid the lank grass outside and in  
human sounds. Even in spring, it all  
stays iced. It reminds me of the recent polar  
air that loiters in crevices everywhere,  
and not least in truths of the erstwhile wise.

One must wait for the double-take to take.  
The directorates of rhyme no longer  
signal where the holy once suddenly arose.  
Reception is poor throughout the skies.  
Raconteurs of the new now forsake  
the aid promised by today's dour luthiers.

## Cabin Fever

I tried to play outside what I knew  
but it never panned out.  
For one thing, I wore too much wool.  
For another, I was never  
bold enough to let go my look of woe.  
For as long as I could trace,  
I went from blankets of cold that smother  
my rooftops to rooms  
where I couldn't find green scarves  
or sounds like the word "cello."

But where else to go to  
escape Babylon II out there, places at war  
constantly strafed by  
the furious righteous.  
Better to stand by windows, become  
a mere silhouette to others,  
stop looking for the fleece, accept that  
staid meanings can't mean again,  
hold out for a tree's unseen angles.

## Creative Writing 202

N.B. warns, "Don't begin a poem with  
the workshop 'I' unless  
to write another schleppey act of  
self-regard among the trite.  
The same goes for using the royal 'we.'"

But "I," uh, take my marching orders  
from a mind next door, not  
from the scripted roar of a hurt horse.  
As for my "we," I didn't mean to  
include you; only an imagined  
poverty-stricken me

If he reads the core of the former,  
he might want to reexamine the source of  
his wise law for play and ask,  
"What if we can find spring in summer again,  
or in time even urge some sleuth to  
search for the 'I' right when it disappears?"

### Northern Lights

On Rte. 89 towards Vermont  
 right now the summer trees  
 are tight to the road  
 The sides lock up the sky when  
 you try to see  
 I hear tell that most evenings  
 even a lost, large sea-bull  
 could very well be headed this way  
 Nothing could block it  
 and who can say what else is in flight  
 so full of thick it's gotten  
 That's as I rattle along and later whiz ahead  
 in my own dark metal mimic  
 of a hot roar to the north

Here it all makes for eldritch shadows inside  
 blocks of shade where  
 at least no mobile cameras  
 will soon penetrate  
 Is this dense scene somewhere where  
 someone like Jesus got born  
 For us today, it seems like the right place  
 to find an afterlife, or  
 at least a space where two faces  
 might want to tell the other  
 how short a while it was to tremble at  
 whatever it is  
 So I drive on, humbled by oncoming nights  
 hoping, hunched, ready for miles

### The Muse during a Noon Nap

I saw you come back this afternoon  
 but it was the color of shade outside  
 and it felt like a formal soirée  
 or perhaps a ball to  
 celebrate what somebody else had done.  
 You had a smoke in your hand  
 and looked svelte from the side, dressed  
 in black with legs in casual stride.  
 And again your hair came down, that long,  
 straight gold, although I sensed  
 that somehow somewhere in some other sphere  
 by now it must have become all gray.

I noticed, too, you followed  
 a fey, femme sophisticate who paced quick  
 outside my gaze, fixed on a goal and  
 so who hardly looked bereft.  
 (I knew her once as a scholar with thin legs  
 and the severe face of dogma.)  
 You didn't know the crowd,  
 but I glimpsed you follow her from the right  
 in a smooth flash of style.  
 It seemed another cold catastrophe,  
 that you now transpired twice  
 to leave my life.

You appeared, in short, next to my absence.  
 Then I saw someone by the bar,  
 young, he had already lent you a glance,  
 seemed a well-known star  
 and I noted was quite coiffured  
 (whereas I had none) so wasn't a bit distraught.  
 I asked him, Oh yes, that's her for sure,  
 why not go over and say hello,  
 it might be better this time? who knows,  
 as in a second chance  
 she might at last relent and sigh to  
 see you and not  
 revert to the old kind of dance.

In my own skin, I was, you can guess,  
 paralyzed with ongoing loss.  
 What do I do now that the dream's turned  
 ice cold--should I follow, out of breath,  
 her image down the street?  
 But the thought of tomorrow's dry weather  
 takes me by the throat.  
 I no longer think I might somehow finesse death.

She couldn't make it work, although I still  
want to imagine her framed in bronze  
right before she again disappears as a picture  
becoming effaced by my own words.

### The Leaf-Blower

I blow them everywhere,  
 off the driveway and stone walk  
 into the nearest thing to woods,  
 far away from common talk.  
 If I could  
 I'd blast them out of the bedroom too.  
 My machine works well enough.  
 I bought into its force when I was young in  
 a year when I could still stand sounds.  
 Now it stays loud for  
 all the world to hear, but  
 only as long as I don't fall for gloom.

will it last until a relentless  
 gray sky locks me indoors?  
 After all, the leaves keep falling and flee  
 unless night-frost sticks them to  
 the ground. Once I tried blowing them away  
 for good, I went for broke, wanted to  
 see them pass on, I raised Cain  
 believed I could blow them away.  
 But I gave up in the long run. Okay, not now  
 no, go ahead, choke my lawn  
 leave them be like us, all those blown-  
 out, free-floating pieces of.

## Second Thoughts

Most everyone around here  
can agree about the importance of how  
his first words left his lips and  
became atomic sounds.

He could easily have worn a white hat like  
some famous film sheriff  
charged with keeping the law of pure chant.  
Who wouldn't want their own language do the same?

Eventually, though, it hardened into  
hieroglyph. Then I thought, can we ever know  
what he said? I rush back to recover  
the ultra-sight wedged taut inside his alphabet.

I then have to go over it all again,  
go in to get there, so to  
engage and defang the feral, rude matter that  
shuts down his words from flight.

There's more to his narrations than  
some final resolution of doom. Keats once  
wrote to a friend that their deep talk  
didn't stop while under the June trees.

So, too, his was not the croak of  
busted birds, those trapped in a final gloom  
having winged their way in  
some ocean haze, then taken one wrong turn.

## Memorial Day

I found a dried-out leaf from last fall  
There it was again in  
my garage. Each day, one or two arrived  
sent by winds and baked to rust  
Now that it's spring, where  
do they come from, the thoughtless dead

I grabbed one by its veins  
I crumpled and  
shredded it into a thousand bits  
I wanted it to flake in  
my hand, make it until it became mere crust

Afterwards, in a whim  
I threw it into woods near my house--  
you could call it  
a makeshift churchyard for all old leaves  
But then I heard myself say, Get out  
Get out, Get out

## Bible Studies

Moses got things wrong.  
 After the bush, his poems, made of stone,  
 never worked.

Since then, in any case,  
 who really listens to dour imperatives to  
 join the world? These days  
 one sings alone in private rooms lest  
 brutes crash and invade us on famous streets.

I myself remember that a below beast  
 lives inside my house  
 and doesn't leave on weekends.  
 You have to be alert to  
 engage the whims behind any lassitude.

was he why I need no longer kneel  
 and ask forgiveness for not forgiving him?  
 The billions of smashed people--  
 what mallet kept telling them to  
 keep going and head towards some whereto?

Not one scene has ever been for sure.  
 To be there, never here,  
 doesn't pay, any more than age provides  
 the final cure.

I have to remind myself  
 that I want to get back to  
 when lilac juice leaked at midnight  
 or I first smelled ocean  
 as I suddenly came across its sound.

That would've been before  
 it all got caught up  
 in the throes of a tale I once heard  
 about the old Red Sea.

## Getting Old Tomorrow

"old age is the most unexpected of all the things  
that happen to a man."

--Leon Trotsky

Don't make big claims,  
that's the main rule of thumb.  
Even then, speak only in rough prosody.  
Hum a few lines for sound alone.  
For instance, don't say,  
I don't believe, I don't believe.  
The bells in the head all  
have got to go right for that to  
come off well.  
Try a brief flow of words instead.  
Don't abide casual conversations where  
revelations a duo do happen,  
but what good if merely now and then?  
So make it without chimes,  
only a bland tale of drift and clay.  
If you must,  
talk in double-talk.  
You can never trust that what  
you can't say  
just might get said.  
Above all, don't fail to fade.  
Rather ask, what does it mean that  
decades ago, you once saw  
someone fine walk away from your space  
for the last time?

## Shades of Gray

Big difference, wouldn't you say,  
from scratching out  
gnomic sayings while counting  
holy buttons?  
This time it's plain prose without  
imagined applause.  
You want to read average words that  
double back and say, for example,  
blackbirds only caw,  
they don't ask, why here,  
what's the cause, or whose? They  
just perform rites by rote,  
hence minus silken tongues.  
Yes, and forget the flaws of bees  
humming as they go  
gold-blind in the sun.  
Notice, rather, that we grow weight  
or lose bone, but at last  
start to flap alone in space. If  
parliaments speak in important tones and  
leave us no room to pause,  
we need infra-red eyes to  
get beyond laws of the supposed wise.

# Last Lecture on E. Dickinson

I stood at the lectern.  
 I raised questions, but all along I knew water  
 would end each of us. It also  
 threatened to mire my stride in speech.  
 At best, I grabbed a used poetic torch,  
 but while I searched in words for  
 an old New England shrine, I tired in November  
 before I could find her smoldered bush.

Who would notice her muted myth? How many  
 victuals will it take before  
 we all don't know?  
 Even ace chocolatier chefs come to grief  
 in these night-filled days.  
 I wonder if even separate bitterns that  
 still boom alone at midnight  
 can make us admire them in the colden storms.

So I try to trace another of her maybe recitations:  
 "I took my lantern -- walked to  
 the Garden -- to find My self --  
 Of course -- no one There --  
 What did I expect -- the Years had left  
 me Blind -- what use -- Sextants  
 in the mind -- to keep us believing --  
 a Star -- or more -- Arrives --"

### A Poet's Biography

"Say it again, Saxon!  
Hush - Only to me!"  
--Emily Dickinson

why not just leave her alone?  
She was made not to be known.  
Near the end, she wore the white gown  
whether just to keep the foul outside  
or else herself out of sight  
except to herself; but anyway, a way from  
the need to wear goggles  
in a house of hush. And maybe  
she kept some plants in place  
that showed New England dust as  
she thought of yet another word for ruin.  
She did it for as long as you can,  
anonymous footsteps in rooms  
in dark months blowing down indoor fires,  
or in those evenings when the fear  
comes on strong and then somehow expires.

## Music to My Ears

I thought I had thought things through  
but then was the scene  
of cremated birds,  
the craquelure of faces,  
people wearing helmets in the hall  
It was enough for me to  
breathe loss for years to come  
I went back over tales of  
the auk. I traced them beyond screens  
of defunct verbs to a place  
where it felt fated that  
people appear at the table again  
and again, whether way back when or now  
and never ask why they never learned  
how to fly. And what of  
gaunt olive trees found lost near  
rocks stripped of moss?  
Or note the ferns turned raw in nodes of  
August. Sooner than not, old men  
at last skinned to bone  
testify to life when doing a soft judder  
to a Mozart or Prince tune  
with its slow motion of underwater sound  
resisting becoming past

### A Mysterious Stranger

Now and then  
someone comes out of the crowd  
anything but staid  
even like an unexpected saint  
but with no vestments, no din  
only a calm wisdom about  
suburbs stripped of meadows and  
bereft of common beasts  
He just arrives in a disheveled dash  
looks at us with odd eyes  
then makes a stream of aperçus  
They flash wit  
shot through with themes such as how  
he was on this street  
only minutes ago  
and we had failed to greet him

### The Poet Stalker

She must have cut her chops on  
 of all things  
 an image for charred tulips,  
 burnt petals, whatever that  
 barely clings to  
 the possibilities of meaning.  
 Was it that made me want to sound her script?  
 In one study, she referred  
 to how she once noticed birds in Berlin  
 falling on wintered ground or  
 on some otherwise commonplace Strasse.  
 There she might have met, she wasn't sure,  
 the Strange, face to face.

Maybe because I later  
 read her this way, that is, on paper,  
 I never matched the fevered pace  
 of her vagabond wit.  
 For that reason, too, she never heard  
 my own complaint: who are you  
 not to know me as I bear down and  
 ponder over what leads to dark spaces in  
 your lines of verse?  
 Yet I swear I follow you hard,  
 every tainted thought,  
 especially the one about how going back  
 was never in the cards.

In short, I chase her nouns as best I can,  
 rub them to watch how flames  
 look near the void.  
 Her chapped eyelids hint at no desire to flee.  
 In fact, I hear her start to insist that  
 we should listen to  
 the ultrasound of spring cardinals as  
 they take leave for flight.  
 Exactly right there, she says,  
 you'll learn how to trace my quixotic moves.  
 Without question, you'll always  
 have time to break free,  
 so don't blame me if you still don't see.

### A Cynical Letter

As for the far past, people stank then,  
     let's not forget that, especially  
 when bowing down to saints or dwelling on  
     The heroes that roamed with no mind in mind.  
 The same doubt goes for lovers who never  
     waken with last-night breaths to breathe.

Of course, I speak of "us,"  
     but down deep we go solo with no praise,  
 and best soon we too become  
     strange striations, sign of the dodo's sigh,  
 the fused fossil in a later rock.  
     Things just don't appreciate things.

What is it, then, about  
     this fantastic tour of nothing?  
 What for, the odd use of bread to honor  
     the dead? Can we make more of the first  
 aromas of spring after salt-doggs  
     spread grits of sand on our winter souls?

Is coma the answer, then? I still see tons of  
     men singing for another war.  
 No, no face can save, no fit of hand, no faux  
     gold-plated pterodactyls in the sky  
 that an ancestor or two once christened  
     as the "They who Know."

### Migrations in a Storm

Look, the flight of ducks is a mess  
 not because they break form on their way south  
 only that their famed order makes no sense  
 since endless repetition ends in doubt

It's all like the red maple that now  
 coughs up its expired leaves  
 as they fall helpless in a wet fall given  
 its usual tear-up of phenomena

I say this to my grandson in private  
 I urge him not to worry, just don't forget  
 the sky, but also take  
 unknown routes before you go indoors

For there's an inner room to the room I enter  
 There I can see mute, dark fowl  
 milling back and forth, their wings kept close in  
 as they walk around like fanged penguins

Worse, they have faces that make me fear  
 as if they're smiling and somehow know the truth  
 why don't they ever stop? Deranged  
 intimate moments seem everywhere on the prowl

Aquae Vitae

Below the surface,  
 strange and surely ancient  
 yellow-gilled sea fish continue to glide  
 far from any coast.  
 There are others that also  
 have no relation to worn shapes and yet  
 flow on as they dodge each other  
 in colors of camouflage.

In fact, deep down, we ourselves strive to  
 form whatever moves that  
 don't have to be. Just think of  
 our investigations that  
 push for civilizations that soon lack  
 numinous totems and slaughter any  
 mysterious perception of daily sunlight.  
 why can't we halt the same?

How many more arks will it take to hire  
 crews to protect us from  
 the pain of breathing dull air? worse, hour by  
 hour, the young keep getting old  
 as a force of oceans would crush our brains  
 and hasten our slide into motion  
 alone, although in our case without  
 the pomp of majolica fins.

### Thoughts at a Hair Salon

I saw a zany sign, a sign's sign, no fooling:  
 "You too could look like Kierkegaard  
 if you use Control 78."  
 It was a new shampoo in a black bottle.  
 But I said, no dice,  
 it won't work because, believe me,  
 I've tried. First off, I have  
 no hair, it left back there, and, second,  
 so it was not worth the price.

Besides, I've come to the edge of  
 final things and can finger the bruise:  
 None of us can ever recover the same moment.  
 If you ask me, we cruise this way  
 and that, seldom play nice.  
 At best, we're epicures, going for gin and  
 uncured flesh, or what can make us  
 tight as we await the peregrine  
 soaring down to snap our spines.

In one sense, then, signs possess  
 a ferocity that tests our boredom.  
 In another, terror of the skies has us  
 wanting machines that soon enough  
 smooth us down, ape our moves, have us miss  
 the terrible shock-green of landscapes that  
 alone can justify our eyes.  
 Relaxed cues to live lead to worn-out sighs  
 and make us damn the antic scene.

So forget about it, please. Whenever we intone  
 programmed ads, then we descend  
 into chronic thoughts that move nothing,  
 least of all stones guarding a ceramic holy man.  
 The mind loves impossible size, but  
 utopian resurrections now turn out zones  
 of pain and fat perplexities. Today  
 lax, old men lose their way and equivocate while  
 walking with gold-tipped canes.

## Guys Night Out

The brain was meant to kill.  
 It developed for that reason as well as  
 for us to climb the sky.  
 Hence, if we first  
 notice that the rush of blood exists  
 as if it will hardly cease,  
 we also cling to wish if only to  
 watch it diminish in force.  
 It happens again and again, of course,  
 the sure loss of friend and foe.  
 Given this cross, to probe more  
 is to persist like pent-up saps against  
 the odds. Or is this a case  
 for the last wake of saints?

Take how the first Dylan and Louie MacNeice  
 once sang battle pretty much  
 all night long without a decent break while  
 they heard the clink of  
 dark pints pressing on pumps of thirst.  
 They themselves drank hard stuff  
 since for yet one more time, they knew  
 they would sink to defeat  
 and eventually weigh less than  
 the shadows each glimpsed in his glass.  
 Whatever it was  
 would shut them down entire  
 with no fête, no self left on some map,  
 no bluff, no regret.

But at least they tried to go for laughs.  
 So what if the two couldn't repeat  
 last-night's visions had they cared to,  
 hunched over, as they'd been,  
 in the rap of extempore while trying  
 to believe an inch of woe made final sense?  
 Yet they returned again and again, no less  
 good and ready to stop thoughts of  
 all the butcher's stare.  
 Their attempt to get beyond the grim  
 and believe they could  
 never left them, as they sought to cut  
 their drinks not with water, but with what  
 we once called hymn.

"The last radio is playing"

--Bob Dylan

Mornings in the 1940s  
 a blue box with plastic yellow knobs  
 spoke with this and that intimate voice.  
 You had to imagine its face,  
 round or perhaps with an Anglo-Saxon bass.  
 For a while I heard a war was going on,  
 but I was too young to know.  
 For example, I thought all Germans were green.  
 Sometimes it announced that city streets  
 raged full of snow and rabid, cold winds.

And yet, I was told that things  
 would turn out indubitably fine.  
 In those days bars appeared fewer to me,  
 and even dumb souls were bound to get saved.  
 Besides, loud adverts extolled  
 certain treats from cigars to chrome cars  
 that could lead to happy debuts.  
 People also essentially believed in harps,  
 that is, never really died  
 but instead simply left for better ground.

Of course, nowadays airwaves alone  
 can't prevent the inevitable scars.  
 At best, radio worlds twin with techno-guides  
 and electric sigils to see you through.  
 Doubtless they all provide a pleasant ride,  
 no albatross tracking like a ghost.  
 They can bring you far from  
 seacoast tides that leave behind  
 thin sticks of soundless loss.  
 What fool wants to become a wet fossil?

But then, I see now that some people exist  
 who should never die but do  
 while those who should  
 hang on, persist, forever battle  
 to outlast our vigils.  
 Can we ever doubt this doubt enough to  
 vent a calm bravado or at least avoid the prattle?  
 Edification now descends from loud louts.  
 Hidden wires ruin our skies  
 while our profoundest verbs go numb in crowds.

### A Flâneur without a Cell-phone

Every day he got up after lunch  
and wrote a poem.  
Was it because of the remaining hunger?  
Maybe it was the usual thought of death,  
brought on, perhaps, by the way  
he wambled a bit more than normal in this,  
his near-eightieth year,  
walking urban streets in Manhattan  
or Brooklyn, but on occasion  
Paris as well, or next to a canal while  
touring a Venetian palazzo or two  
(of course with Byron in the bells); or  
drifting in a daze while rhyming  
bananas (no small feat) in Caicos; which  
is why he no doubt defined poetry  
quite precisely  
as almost making sense of chaos,  
the preamble to words.

Sometimes his hands might tremble  
in writing the poem du jour  
on his own veranda,  
but that only got him primed to do another,  
often while he heard sirens  
telling of the place's daily wrecks.  
In other words, subjects cropped up  
like a garbage of smells,  
for he was in any case long besotted with  
the traffic of hectic faces passing by,  
especially those that preached  
the sublime of unexpected whim,  
the detour of passion kept private as they  
lurched just out of reach.

He allowed for more mundane explanations, too.  
For example, he could instantly  
conjure Brace Beemer's voice hamming up  
the Lone Ranger programs long ago,  
a metaphor for how he once thought of God  
when he would march toward synagogue or church  
or later beseech some other kind of dream.  
Closer to home, it was enough for

his laced shirt to start itching for him  
to ask what else was there to  
bitch about, which you can be sure  
quickened a few more lines out of the blue.

The point was that he was  
a rather insane man with a good brain.  
In this age of ungrammatical waste, he kept  
writing simply because, as the years  
flew by, he would wait for daylight and, before  
he went back and slept, surprise, surprise,  
so far it had always arrived,  
his fears thus as ever an inane naught.

## Missing Cyd Charisse

Did a god invent the foot,  
 the wolf or window, the dumb bacterium in  
 the woods on a leaf,  
 the forgotten, could-have-been love  
 years ago, then the grief and  
 need not to be alone?

I used to see searchlights in the sky.  
 It was during World War Two,  
 but even today when, for the moment,  
 there's a war to scan everywhere,  
 they still go nowhere.  
 they still show nothing of my night.

Can at least stars provide better light?  
 Long ago, we thought they could forecast and  
 lend us an edge of sight to halt the falling  
 dark. But is truth finally  
 truer than fiction, since neither they nor  
 wooden runes ever got things right?

I once saw a woman in a public film.  
 She danced with eloquent leg to the soft-brushed  
 sound of a band, both of them  
 hidden away in some private room. Although  
 clothed in scarves of crystalline lime and white,  
 she left no signs back to her soul.

You always know what you have to do:  
 let go, let go, let go, accept the new role,  
 which was how I think plodding ants  
 with minute, infinite claws  
 survived the sudden shifts of stone and slime  
 during ancient swathes of ruin.

## Two Polar Bears at a Concert

when I graduated from high school  
 Shostakovich was already sick  
 and from many things.  
 (So I read later.  
 What else do you have to go on  
 since we each grieve at a distance?)

He must've foreseen his rusted body,  
 sensed enemy threats,  
 also rumors of eternal Siberian frostbite.  
 That would be the end unless  
 he could translate sound into something  
 safe from intrusions of  
 men lurking in the thick boughs of pine.

I think he kept his best notes mute and  
 tight to himself, that was  
 his final art, flights from coercion;  
 nor did he care to  
 notice what birds came shouting,  
 once back in the Russian spring.

After I graduated from being young,  
 I wondered what a mahogany bassoon meant for  
 Shostakovich when juxtaposed to  
 the force of fibbed accusations  
 and the utopian scripts that we all, yes,  
 mattered. It led him to  
 crown separate black waves in space.

And so we might have met, and for  
 no other reason, during some permanent  
 civil intermission on  
 a mezzanine floor, both of us content to be  
 where no one complained, say  
 about the continental drifts of mind.

## Revelation

There's nothing wrong with  
 getting drunk at seventy-eight except that  
 it doesn't work. For one thing,  
 I hear the cries of rooks in the woods.  
 Many don't hear them because they  
 prefer samurai yells. It's as though  
 we need to double down to prove we're fated,  
 not accidental stumbles into the here.

I think back to how I sipped  
 snatches of wisdom that I never owned.  
 They left me to bumble along alone.  
 Had I, then, nothing to impart, no  
 phonetic spree that could  
 stop me in my tracks and make sense of  
 why trees aren't upside down, or  
 we should ever say hello to foul fools?

Today invisible flakes fall on the upper leaves  
 and spring's early sparrows.  
 I decide to dodge evangelists of ideas,  
 the precious gold they  
 think they own. Instead, I go for the bliss  
 of a kind of poverty that,  
 in the split second of the inexplicable,  
 allows me not to want more.

## A Minor Manifesto

I'm on the roadside  
     and I just saw you pass by  
 rushing to the park of public poets  
     and all the wing-spray that  
 comes off parades of so-called knotted truths.  
     It wasn't unlike tame, summer ducks  
 larking in water before audiences of bread.  
     There's just no escape from  
 the taste for the new verser, whether  
     by Myrmidons in classic beards  
 or today's critical sleuths who  
     hasten elimination of once infinities.  
 Contrary to popular reports, rules  
     set down by ministers of oracular prose and  
 praise for baroque visions found  
     in books crammed with distant rhymes  
 would push us down to final, minor throes.  
     It doesn't matter that  
 in certain casual sessions, we too can  
     occasionally touch the bright virgule  
 or, in words, trace intrigues of sweating fowl.  
     For us billion duds, known  
 instead by backwater tiers of speech,  
     a soon extinction regulates our upper moves.  
 Neither a sullen, stoic stance  
     nor so-called manna that no longer soothes  
 (left behind after tides of myth,  
     now dried out from relentless suns)  
 can alleviate the loss of our random noise.  
     For now, we reside in places

where, with no fanfare, we grope to express  
blank terror, not canons of joy as  
vented by choirs beholden to solemn tones.  
Do you wonder why we therefore  
live for the time when honored,  
dire truths will just up and die,  
leave us alone to turn away from the violence  
made by swoops by some singular owl?  
As a last resort, and before we tire and bend,  
we would sign pacts not to publish  
or, if barred from quietude, at least taint  
words that, in the end, anyway  
always stiffen and lie there in a way  
none of us can quite comprehend at night.

## A Selfie

Too late  
I have no desire to post  
my inside to your out.  
I have no last-minute doxology to bring you.

I'm in the grip of one or another power,  
texts that read like silk or have  
the serene slide I once knew when she was  
in the middle of a private trance.

Can we tell any more who we are before  
we phone ourselves elsewhere?  
Can we send our latest face to whoever in  
a room never hears us?

## The First Tree (Revised)

I'm telling you  
 up there, sixty, seventy feet high  
 is no gauze-bright  
 white host with wings  
 stating Beware

Neither is it some satanic warbler  
 asking us once more to go ahead and dare  
 No hero in the clouds  
 and no ghosts spawned from fear  
 are there at the end  
 of this lone, smooth stem

It just leads to a violent spread  
 of late-year leaves  
 as they shed an umbrella shade  
 far above the local lawn  
 All of it will also soon go gone  
 whether felled by  
 the roughage of human hand  
 or dawns become too much to bear

Not many years ahead  
 fate will have left the height  
 of this tall thing  
 cut down to negligible bare stuff

Then a few souls will tell that even  
 that hot seed in a blue sky  
 was once assigned to signify a Lord  
 until it became a stark omen of  
 a life with no eyes and that  
 always never did

But if we can't get new  
 or if we grope for myths that only dim  
 then what is this moment  
 despite how we shiver unlike  
 bodies covered by warmed feathers

we have no maps, only lutes of  
 energy that resist  
 the stiff direction we took even before  
 we left some unknown garden

## Poetry Readings

I prefer speaking on the page  
and then not to many or even the few  
as I did when I was young and felt the will to  
sling instead of hum

No, now it's to someone with muffled ears  
who eschews today's town halls  
at best has a puzzled look that I recall in  
a long-ago past tense

It would be just as somewhere  
a silent gull with a black summer head  
glides down on another ocean  
at best near only a partner's distant sound

I too like to hear a sidebar of nouns that  
at last can teach no one at all  
I reach for what doesn't make sense, such as  
talk recorded on a clay tablet

### The Carpenter

Mister Cohen was one of those passing gods  
 who used to teach twelve-year-old  
 Catholic boys when they marched every week  
 to a different school to learn  
 how to work in wood.  
 He showed us the way to plane or when to  
 use hammer-shined nails into  
 a piece of plank only along a certain grain.

I wonder did he wonder about us  
 for example later at home, at night, at  
 repasts, or whenever he went to  
 synagogue on Fridays.  
 Did he maybe ruminate about  
 what he had taught us beyond work,  
 such as how to do what  
 had come to him without strain?

Don't we all at last pass beneath  
 the same rain, as when  
 he drove to work after dawn?  
 Did he drink to or salute us in brief,  
 that man by now no doubt  
 dead and none, a faux skeleton,  
 a banished face, with his  
 thinned out shawl of prayers left behind?

The woodman Cohen wore a gray frock  
 and once helped me make a lamp that  
 on occasion I lit over years.  
 I like to think it contained his voice,  
 his guidance, now no doubt forgotten under  
 some fore-gone lawn in this,  
 another spring with  
 its unlocked infinity of new leaves.

## Last Call

She said she saw me  
when just passing towards one more vacation  
“We wouldn’t have got it on as before.  
No way.” She’d seen much better since me on  
all kinds of exciting shores.

“Quite right,” I replied.  
“When fall chestnuts fall and thud,  
they must’ve died. So we  
casually eat them at holiday dinners even as  
we keep looking for the chalice.”

I imagined this call inside my head.  
It wasn’t real. The phone  
would’ve rung coarse and loud  
but, secured to a wall, it could never  
have wailed too long if  
I was there with something to say.

The hour had passed. why  
go beyond what I thought I’d said?  
Instead I wandered outside and wondered  
what, after all, had happened to  
those taboos about devouring the dead.

### Grin and Bear It

The I-it dominates, damn it, and  
 no matter where you turn.  
 Buber knew it too.  
 No doubt, he wanted it otherwise,  
 at times would decry it foul,  
 though he could sense its major block.

You and I know it.  
 A young girl, high up on a fall bough  
 back when I was thin and  
 she strummed an unseen guitar with  
 no one else around, she  
 must have felt the lure of a live branch.

Anyway, to this day  
 I remain unsure whether I even  
 heard her make a sound.  
 Maybe she had decided to pose,  
 as in a wistful lark, or else was someone  
 seeking a saner dark.

Or had she only taken a vow to  
 hear it full inside herself and tried to  
 parse its very form? Who  
 can be sure about a girl in a tree on  
 a certain night whom I saw  
 when I didn't know I was seeking a thou?

### Over the Rainbow

when I started out, I wrote in colors,  
plastered them everywhere I  
could imagine. They tore away at  
my insides. I went for images of blue cows,  
green bulls, the yellow crow.

Of course, later on, even vermillion  
came to bore me. I left my palette almost  
bare. The scene had changed.  
After we brought in lake-docks to begin  
winter days, I found what Z. Herbert cites.

He called it the white stone, a hex of self that  
doesn't rust or turn brown like late-summer  
ferns. It was a laser insight,  
bereft of hues. In short, I took him to say,  
why not sacrifice the spectrum whole?

I tried hard, even skipped forms of  
rhyme, but most of all the theme of  
a hoarse god going north.  
Don't ask me why I did it for so long.  
It just wouldn't stop.

It introduced a fear as when in  
a solo sighting, you spot a flock of  
gray fowl lifting off, about to  
disappear fast free into the dark evening  
of a November's chalk sky.

### Reflections on Reflection in a Museum

Moving from room to room, it's hard for me to tell how  
age stuffs my head with gray cloth.  
I look at looks and can't prevent the gloom a canvas  
gives that's meant to stop time then and there,  
a brief glance to my passing mind.

But just when I pull back to make it all seem blasé,  
I hit the wall. Words for this new image  
aren't enough for usual thought. At best, I  
revert to knotty tropes to skirt small talk about  
her gaze and what it's not.

She sits there in a beige wicker chair. She reflects  
back at me in a mirror where at first I thought  
she eyed herself alone or maybe another face in  
that room. What can I make now of her important stare  
drawn when she never thought to notice mine?

Conversation with Victor  
(d. 2006)

Someone rang my door-bell  
it turned out to be an old friend  
who had died years ago  
but there he was.  
"I thought you were dead," I said.  
"I am, but it's not serious," he replied.  
"We're all damaged anyway,  
not that far apart,  
not as much as people think."  
"I know," I said. "I wanted to phone  
you two or three times  
to let you know your name still  
comes up now and then  
despite the big difference."  
"Thanks," he said, "but all the same  
we now get forgotten faster for me than you  
Mine rush rather than inch  
towards a big blank.

"Nonetheless, and for whatever reason  
yours has stayed with me  
I just came because  
I noticed that you keep complaining  
about the wreckage made  
by human noise  
why is that, do you have any idea," he asked  
"I haven't a clue," I said.  
"Might it be another kind of death"

He said, "Listen, speaking of that  
the things I can see now  
would make you tremble down to  
your very soles  
I mean not just the obvious pains such as  
histories of slaughter  
or wonder at the gnomie few who survived  
rape by male machines  
"No, I also think of all the mess that  
lurks behind your stray moments of  
peace, as when I ask, what do you do with  
thoughts abandoned by thought

"I know all about cruel breaches of decor  
such as black cats made into totem fears  
Just as bad in the long run  
consider the concatenation of what  
you'd term hillside, December firs

perhaps stirred to rime by  
upland winds, hunched together in  
below-cold weather

“You never see or hear the ones I mean  
and when you imagine them  
they exhibit nothing but the rust of  
nature that defines my place too  
It looks like a big, fenced-off quiet  
whereas to you those hidden trees at most  
become logs that won’t burn when you  
need to eat while warm in  
homes colored with mahogany walls

“But at times, though,” he then mused  
“I guess I still miss your flawed shebang”

“Look,” I said, “I’m glad to  
almost see and hear you even a thin  
membrane away. But the fact remains that  
your return scares me  
Keep in mind that  
even Confucius worried about how to  
keep ghosts in the distance

“I guess I’d add the same  
about the unusual comfort I get whenever  
I dwell on an ox that  
lasts out its labor to no good end in  
one of our bibles.

“I won’t protest that you’re no more than  
a nothing in damp days,  
a mere figment of me forced to  
listen to the steady loud  
of the world’s still incoherent horns.  
Yet now and then  
(to speak in finite language)  
a muted sound or hang of words springs out  
and leaves us  
close to the brink of awe”

“Ah,” he said, “okay, that  
reminds me, I’ve got to go back  
speechless under those unknown boughs  
I have to leave again  
You don’t meet other people around here  
I’m like one of those dumb  
stiff deer I recall that try to

discover only a few  
hidden legumes in the white frozen woods”

---

After I closed the door  
I thought of other friends going  
the way of gray cloth  
It led me also to wonder  
what happens to crows on the very day  
they lose their steady alert for  
the random dead below  
And what of those dull moths that  
once madly moved amazed towards light in  
the beautiful chance offered by  
a fleeting, fertile night

### Small Potatoes

I had grown uncalled for and,  
 as expected, later resembled a stone.  
 It was just as how I came born  
 yelling at light, or so I was told,  
 right after the big blank.  
 Besides, I wasn't exactly there.  
 At first I was no one, at best someone to  
 someone else, consequently  
 hobbled to begin with,

I was called to be at home  
 but that soon proved  
 tough going. Before they colorized  
 black and white films, I saw  
 things in sharp tones; then I lost  
 belief in how people believed in saints.  
 At noon, a few would see a house,  
 others a tree or perhaps its telling rings.  
 Thus began the wars.

The whole place, you might say,  
 became a tight space  
 bereft of sacristy and dome.  
 Day after day, I heard lots about a god  
 who never cracked a grin.  
 I learned to kneel before people  
 dressed in black--to bow and  
 remain second in command, for otherwise,  
 they said, I wouldn't be.

I rebutted them as best I could,  
 first because I was never  
 sure about the moon.  
 Everything happened for no reason.  
 I noticed that ants and men scattered  
 before stray, outside motions  
 that only might have feigned menace.  
 Tremors that I couldn't trace  
 led me back to words stained with gloom.

The scene seldom stayed normal. It called for  
a hero with perfect metal thighs and with  
the love of changing truths. But I was no  
Captain Marvel who didn't need to worry about  
such things. At first, we live in  
brief memories of the sea; then arctic winds  
arouse aches for a spring garden  
abuzz with bees endlessly circling blooms,  
the kinds nurtured by a permanent chrome sun.

### And Don't You Forget It

I don't like to think of you as  
someone else,  
but there it is, you finally went still.

You once thought your life was full.  
Stories led you to care for  
what was always new.

For example, you laughed with dolls until  
their eyes turned to rag,  
but it was all just a ploy to care for more.

In short, you were already elsewhere,  
tired of the common noise,  
the gagged visions, the pulsing daily sounds.

What did it cost you besides  
bright friends who kept leaving town or, if  
they stayed around, left you alone?

You ended up in the same fix. After  
enjoying flagons of juice,  
you suffered basic pain to the bone.

All of us wish to spot blue dragonflies,  
but can we again  
see them without frowns or notes?

A few flakes have begun to fall.  
I hear someone claim another storm  
is on the way. What now?

### The Past Tense

In the early 1950s,  
we U.S. folk used to worry  
above all about the Reds with their Bomb  
coming from who knows where, say  
Sardinia or Guam. They would  
take us down, taint our  
pure skies, at last make our right wrong.

Worse were Martians. They also threatened  
our very genre. Their  
saucers would rush down at night, find us  
alone and suddenly hit with  
the loud, succinct force of the not-known.  
They meant to hush our baseline hopes  
already heading towards nothing.

Then we learned all of it was for naught.  
Plots and planets were merely  
passing in the black of lost relations to  
the sun. Even lovers began to leave rooms  
dressed in shrouds. Correct me if I'm wrong, but  
don't we always find footprints  
that show us leaving the earth behind?

## Prevarication

I knew from the beginning that  
 we would leave. You might say it was  
 the loss before the loss.  
 Of course, how could I really believe I'd ever  
 disappear? Who wants to go?

But a stealthy nothing  
 continues to happen--like abrupt phone-calls in  
 the deep woods. Inner sanctums have gone  
 the way of mutant vlogs, while at best, voices  
 and shouts mimic human sounds.

I keep waiting for their absence to arrive  
 but things always happen to us with  
 stubborn twists of the rude.  
 How many evenings won't you and I see  
 each other in a calm, soft hue?

Certain plants grow at midnight in a slight  
 shiver, thus pushing against finitude.  
 So what if fire proves at last that  
 we begin as well as end in ash? I write, then,  
 to embrace another impossible quest.

It's late March. A vase is on my table.  
 I hope for guests. Its square, metal column  
 holds unseen buds and holy water.  
 We think to live on and on. It's in our blood  
 to taste our food wearing cashmere vests.

### Right from the Start

I walked out the door, and  
 not a few things had changed for the good.  
 The air had thinned to theory.  
 The faux god, the one I grew up with,  
 now wore a black tuxedo.  
 The land was eerie and grim.  
 Each thought occurred in a fright that

I tried not to store. To be sure,  
 it was still an era of peace. Many with  
 money said we could all afford  
 barometers to gauge our future.  
 But when I did a gun-sight tour of  
 pleasure, it only led back to the loins  
 minus a major thesis.

Could that possibly satisfy long-term?  
 I lowered my eyes, dared to live in ironic  
 ease. why not, since who  
 couldn't see the nightmare fin slice  
 its merry way even to Maine's nearby ocean  
 waters? I took note: every day  
 fate pivots on the brink of eclipse.

I know that at the end  
 there happens the absence of  
 this and that, mostly of pain, which, come to  
 think of it, is the least we desire.  
 But whoever we'll be, we won't have had time  
 to correct the world or understand  
 its ground. Still, like you, on occasion

I can regard an iris unannounced,  
 a random boost, thus to survive in a way  
 that resembles something sane. why otherwise  
 take potions to stall age, coax  
 senile oaks to yield motes of green, spy for  
 patient hawks that sail high  
 and just may have forgotten their prey?

After a while, I punch out and go to  
an unchanged place. I balk at  
defeat. But it's not enough for me to wander  
with no one around inside my made-up Kremlin.  
I need always to beat back loud news  
about the extinction of self. Can anyone stand  
the loss of another star cloud?

## Old Men

I met a man who caned old chairs. He was ancient  
and wove them in a slow peace.  
He re-boned found antiques in surprising style.  
He did it for years until his place,  
the store, burned down.

I now think of what I myself can leave behind  
and not forget the details.  
For example, who will know the face  
that once just about did me in,  
the kind that leads you to recall hurt wings?

Sky-fathers likewise leave me nil.  
They go the way of  
stale, medieval monks, those who chanted  
Latin in white robes and tried to  
touch their Paladin in forms of metered sound.

I myself once tried to prance and do big deeds.  
Lately I don't even need to try, since  
I too got burned out and panicked like  
some programmed bird that forgot how to make  
a simple nest from dried-out brush.

## Auto-Memoir

You can define it as my fault: I always  
 wore a hood to greet the crowds.  
 I found it easier to forget how  
 I said many things that  
 each time vanished in a free-fall of doubt.

On the whole, and even before I left,  
 it never made sense to me.  
 I tried to make it feel normal, but  
 no shocks of insight ever came that refute  
 the subsidence of the blithe.

It happens to everyone. Even  
 a dead Houdini failed to utter "Rosabelle"  
 promised to his wife from  
 the other side. People peopled in our heavens  
 simply migrate to hush.

We steer towards a solemn November life.  
 I'm calling it off.  
 Something blows down heavy rains and  
 makes it hard to play anymore.  
 Games anyway end on some usual is isn't.

## Time Travel

"What fools men are to raze a city, destroying tombs,  
and temples, and sacred places, when they are so soon  
to die themselves."

--Euripides, The Trojan Women

I can't write about village enemies.  
I'm not one of those who  
can tell you how I hid behind thick trees in  
a war-zone while I watched men  
shoot existence to hell.

Anyway, they often did it,  
so I prefer to think, that they might later  
share with friends what seemed sane but wasn't,  
as when young they made jokes of others  
all before they each flamed out and age became.

But then, should I make up bare plots with  
no point, or listen for  
rain without thunder,  
or hear someone say something like Silkenloch?

I finally ask,  
do I really want to come back in memories,  
say like one partial grain of  
snow that bangs against night windows?

I saw two strangers this evening  
and sensed the juice do its thing, I mean  
the way she swings in sync with  
his suave moue. For god's sake, will  
more infant lives soon populate this place?

Is it mostly from a rush to do something beyond  
the suspected fake hello,  
a ruse, then, for us in fact to  
become common data,  
a brute nada, the visage that almost was?

It's hard to take, this late run through  
space, with, listen,  
warnings from the loud cicadas in the bushes.  
Surely, then, we need to beware.

A Cottage circa 1944

I knew it as soon as I came across  
 the crest and breathed  
 the salt scene, the waves, the people,  
 (who were they again?). I was five or  
 four, less or more, fixed in a splash of  
 summer. At night, I caught smells  
 that deterred mosquitoes and were  
 mixed in with the wooden,  
 vacation walls. I also sensed how  
 night filled my room, but I was told not to  
 worry, it was nothing deep. Perhaps  
 I only heard the tides ebbing for good.

Years later I came across an exit sign  
 on the way from another  
 family cottage on a lake with no swells but  
 just glass-polished water on  
 August mornings . . . no ocean scene here that  
 could wash me away. Should I  
 go back to where I would now need  
 more than a stick to plumb the ancient  
 seaside air? How many times would  
 I have to stumble on  
 those cobblestoned streets before I could  
 scent again the locus of the first wisdom?

## Bad Trips

At twelve, I knew about a certain few who  
 did heroin near Shultas Place.  
 It was a strange area north from where  
 I lived. Some made it out  
 that heroes resided there.  
 In those days, they might've served  
 as daring savants of danger.

It was a time when the real  
 surely somehow resided on the next block.  
 They all but said to us,  
 "Clock your moves, find whatever dose  
 you like, but note that  
 sniffing glue is never enough to  
 get the right daze on this here earth."

That's how it went down.  
 They would smoke wax, punch holes in  
 arms, in short tax their brains.  
 They hung out on corners and feigned  
 lax stances with a dull gaze.  
 Paradise was the place where you need not  
 strain against disclosures by the sun.

There was no cartouche to record  
 their later, bleaker days,  
 how or when they fell to turf.  
 I try to figure out whether they ever  
 began to wonder if there was  
 no end to complex faces or groping in  
 the senseless maze.

Some got caught by crime and ended in law.  
 Think of the inspired lines  
 that one forgets in your very next breath.  
 Only one or two, I imagine, escaped  
 the need to go all the way and find  
 there was nothing left except  
 not to care, not even for a dumb divine.

Come to that, now that I myself have  
 a wrinkled neck and lack beads such as I  
 once used to pray to clouds,  
 I think it might be the same everywhere.  
 In Africa, say, or Hartford,

what is it that moves us to  
praise numb promisers of the latest con?

## The Gas Man

Nineteen-forty-eight, and for  
whatever reason  
I heard that the flow-charts  
had shut down tight  
I didn't know what or why that was  
I was seven, and it reminded me of  
this guy who walked by  
our apartment places on the avenue  
He'd laugh and joke with us  
and then one of the kids said that  
someone else had said the man  
once or twice had snorted gasoline  
and maybe still did--"really!"

I may have seen him another summer  
and he did seem a bit do-lolly  
My memory now smudges out his face  
for he'd left no trace  
Now that I think about him  
he was hardly a fecund itinerant  
Maybe they even  
put him away in a white room. But  
I suspect I knew even then  
that despite all his vroom  
he just didn't know  
where he was going, the same  
as us years later

### Hummingbirds

They live to eat and vice-versa  
 on and on they go  
 the close-to invisible flash  
 of secret wings  
 they just keep pressing to find  
 insects in the passing air

we think, then, that at best they stalk  
 but can't ever know

It's not like the quick glance at  
 someone's walk that afterwards  
 reminds us of a portrait's  
 intriguing insides  
 we want our muscles to hold off  
 such suave seductions

Otherwise too soon we accept the urge to  
 repeat reproduction

when do they sleep and not feed and  
 therefore just hang near  
 the nearest tree to spot the next  
 repast of unseen, minuscule mites  
 Myself, I, too, try not to ravish  
 sights that almost never were

why not leave it a former pang or just  
 the thin wall of was

### A Rhode Island Visit

we walked around a tennis-court preserve.  
X reminisced about who  
they once were,  
the names on plaques under an old sun.  
They stood for a fiction that  
once had been. We passed a garden  
along the way. We watched that as well,  
but of course would never  
see it grow. It had little point in  
our own invisibly bronzed day.

Still, ours was a different Newport,  
a simple, straight vacation.  
We existed with friends, and it was  
all in the fall.  
Somewhat later, we simply wanted  
not to forget. We drank  
more wine at night and talked  
through dinner. Somewhere among the words  
and by the candlelight, we, too,  
were playing in the past.

## House Pet

She's no rook, although she has a beak.  
 There's a nest of twigs below  
 my house's corner gutter, and  
 this robin looks to kill me if I near it.  
 More than once, she suspects  
 I'm getting close, and then I hear her shrieks.

That's especially the case this year  
 when I hold a stick and  
 look as if I'm headed toward her nest.  
 Will I destroy her hungry brood that next year  
 will build their own homes like this?  
 Thus I try hard to keep away for now.

Why risk it, since if I don't, it's bound to  
 arouse a matron's rage,  
 regardless her smooth cape of wings and  
 famous taste for spring?  
 When we both hear the violent flutter of her  
 like things, her eyes get jammed blank.

As long as she patrols my yard, I keep to  
 myself, I don't want any trouble.  
 Besides, doesn't my own inch-deep lawn wall off  
 chaos and so mimic her nest's stall of  
 homicide, which occurs  
 whenever we prod the being of beings?

December 32<sup>nd</sup>

Nearing the time zone, did I  
really want to be heard after my absence,  
never mind listen to the non-talk,  
the yak in cafés, even  
the smart insights heard during cremations?

Consider the wisdom torn from old  
tomes, read in bedrooms, said on lecterns,  
some even I made but now can't recall.  
We forget that we exist,  
have a warped slant on what we saw and said.

It's not unlike the Taj Mahal that few  
ever witness, as on a hot,  
clear evening. And what of the mess of  
going and coming star-worlds that  
we'll never get to see?

Let's, then, stay inside and meet only  
at the door. Barring that, late at  
night why not dismiss the raptors we dream that  
used to sink their fangs in flesh for  
no reason but for another spin in air?

I know, I know, there are severe miles  
for us still to go,  
plagues of fogs ahead to dodge.  
No doubt, so many blur our will to see  
our insides repeating the same.

We chase tail-winds thanks to  
our absent, human fins. At best, we flap our  
hands until we fall one evening, which  
we had anticipated but not really knew  
we would fail without style.

### A Quantum Theory

And here we meet again,  
virtual wavelets for a moment, one of  
them a memory, not that deep, of  
someone's having said, who knows when,  
"Hey, lover, I'm over here now."

We never knew that green things  
weren't really green, yet somehow we  
continued to breathe. Then we felt that  
enough wasn't enough. Part of us  
had slipped off unseen to other worlds.

### Broken Bollards

In their certain relation to breath,  
 lust made gangs of monks  
 come together and  
 curse anyone else for disbelief.

But sung prayers were fictile respites  
 against the flat life. I myself  
 don't like wild weeds turned into fixed  
 rubber flowers. And who doesn't hate  
 to see an average person slip on  
 curbs while others walk around blasé in  
 their wet October coats?

Worse, who can forgive the self-certain style  
 of saints? I prefer to live in a world  
 full of vacant lots between buildings where  
 I can still hear loud complaints.

When it's almost over, I'll enjoy saying  
 I attended only one or two orgies of  
 self-congratulation with men  
 who bragged they had chosen the fate of  
 dread. They would have thick arms,  
 have worn dragons on their vests, but always  
 worried why they hadn't won.

Peace is always unrest, like a white fish  
 cutting through water, vanishing  
 again and again; not like tired fall leaves  
 becoming tons of dull, empty mass.

### The Magic Show

One by one and of course bit by bit,  
 this friend and others (and  
 what of our conversations last spring?),  
 first, they were, afterwards not.

Only a few care to take in what the years do.  
 The eyes disclose deaths in braille.  
 Then it happens that outside, one's own failings  
 pass all understanding.

It's how I once viewed trees in the south.  
 Haloed in smoke, they evoked sounds of  
 a raven's blank caw as  
 it trespassed on late, fallow graves.

whatever it was that we missed  
 again slides invisible into a crevice or two.  
 No one will notice what didn't happen  
 well before oceans eradicate the human trial.

I used to boat over a lake's early waters  
 looking for a place I couldn't know.  
 Now it's enough for me to recall that what I found  
 was the distant glow of a former lighthouse.

Jesus hid inside a lost rock, his Father  
 a militant of the great past tense; a brief flash of  
 bliss, Buddha turned into a frozen mask.  
 Later, people hailed popes who prayed in crypto.

If you and I ever return, it won't be as  
 in Armageddon, but rather as  
 transient, Eurasian blackbirds, sailing away fast  
 in the wake of vanishing miles.

### A Workingman's Survey

After I retired from  
 active scholarly duty, I began to write  
 and, I admit it, for my pains  
 got a bout of shortened breath when  
 I thought about light at last  
 not coming back. I tried to say to  
 myself, Don't dare preach, since no one  
 ever lives or dies.  
 I was right about that from the start:  
 we were and always were not.

I could never find that twist in new books,  
 nor did my words, fused by metaphor,  
 work to make it all look good.  
 I kept fiddling with how things used to  
 mean and now don't--you know,  
 the intimates I knew, one by one, their  
 laughs expunged. Or take  
 the double I don't know in my morning glass.  
 More and more, I seem to be  
 part of a crowd who just spilled seeds.

I drive around and certain stop-lights  
 don't make sense any more. Now and then, I  
 think of buzzards that can't fly  
 downwards while their prey, rife  
 with life, stumble on ants. Invisible  
 sunspots continually disrupt  
 our daily intercourse with water, sand and  
 lovers. And despite consulting runes,  
 few of us find ourselves  
 able to predict that what was, was.

### Famous Dreams

I'm sure he still writes a poem or two,  
 maybe as well a collection by now.  
 He was that ambitious, sought to know who to  
 know to get his new verse inked,  
 thus have everything he thought matter to  
 to thousands. I forget his name, but  
 he never doubted his poetic scenes wouldn't  
 singe our minds with important steam.  
 How could the game's stakes outrace his fame?

Back then, I myself hid behind branches that  
 once quivered from one or another  
 passing spirit of place. After a while,  
 I just couldn't believe in stained-glass windows.  
 Where was the beyond? These days, people  
 like him wear tattoos, bodies covered by  
 icons galore, such as a blue flag, an iris or  
 cut-glass buddha. It's to get before  
 when words come to mean--for which, Good luck.

Years after, and wherever his scrawled truths  
 appear, whether in flower-shows or conferences on  
 doves, I myself dwell in the north.  
 It's raining ice strings today as I pick up and  
 read the parchment news. It's now, what,  
 sixty or more years since  
 I haven't heard about his work. Does he  
 still press someone to print his newest page  
 before fast cyber winds blow it away?

## 1783 Redux

I always thought that  
 one more reason for the American Revolution,  
 aside from English hauteur.  
 bourgeois lust and the retention of  
 racial deeds, was to  
 take down Puritan bosses, those who to  
 this day would occlude  
 lucid tales of rare birds or  
 what we think about a wind's un-direction.

They would blackmail us with  
 one or another imprisoned heaven, a "must"  
 they invented from fears of  
 arbitrary planets spinning in pro-tem orbits.  
 And so how could we have any more  
 going-nowhere discussions in summer gazebos?

Now it's time to leave all that behind  
 if only to keep secrets  
 secret. I tell my shadow we should  
 hold out against Hegel  
 and now electronic wizards who  
 foresee us daily, infiltrate our arms  
 and cause worry about  
 inner popes that dictate our aches.  
 what else is there to say?

How many of us talk to others as  
 we lie hidden in wait?  
 It won't be long before I get excited  
 over the fate of not knowing how  
 we all turned out. At most, I'll try to read  
 histories of cathedrals without people.

### St. Francis after Coronavirus

People write because  
they must recover from disaster, thus  
2020 bacilli eat our world  
But do they move forward gasping for fuel  
as they wander from here to there

They seem to invade our logics  
but do they take that as  
their equivalence for a new advance  
or rather just flake around  
sail in air not caring for anywhere

They devour our need to treat life as  
something beyond instead of as a fake shock  
one more double of blind motion  
threats of disease on an endless rise  
a game with no beginning

We're just not in the cards  
We're things that become more and more  
hunched against dread, or else made of  
thoughtless thoughts, as in an empty church  
brown robes left on the floor

## Disagreements

I noted where the critic of one poet  
insisted No to his works  
and did it with a mouth-horn  
tight with reason.  
But scripts that elude even stats of  
last fall's torn leaves  
can blow us away, make indelibly precise  
the almost inept connections,  
first between guests  
and then us two members of another life.

They're what matter,  
this cacography of blessed acoustics.  
They provide us with  
unnecessary gifts, and, because in passing,  
they yet allow for the quirky riff,  
the spells of nonsense. Maybe we'll decipher  
them by noon, these exotic glyphs,  
but we remain marooned in grooves where  
enough has no measure.

## Fences II

## 1

I notice there are good faces next door.  
 I regard them sometimes from afar.  
 Some people claim I should call them neighbors.  
 Perhaps. Whatever rings your bells.

## 2

They have children, too. Occasionally  
 I can hear the little girl cry,  
 likely due to some push or shove, gratis  
 her older brother's whim.

Thus, early on he's blindly shown her  
 she's not absolute. What else is new? At best,  
 she's like the rest of us,  
 a bit happy here and there, but of minor fame.

I won't ever know if, after years from now,  
 She'll have forgotten the half-floating, foreign  
 sounds that once surrounded her and  
 were hers alone on past summer days.

## 3

And sometimes, too, I note that her father  
 cooks on the deck's grill, really  
 not that far away. In that way, he also  
 fires up the family commune.

## 4

I'd like to see things the way they do.  
 I'm told others hum a similar tune:  
 that we wonder alike, for don't we all  
 want the same small things?

But only by their words can I finally know them.  
 They send out vaporous smoke signals that  
 must signify we're close by.  
 Is that why we keep our distance?

Pace Joan Murray

Tremendous are the ways of the simple people,  
The hills speak with their mouths,  
The sky laughs out the rims of their eyes . . .

--Joan Murray  
("Vermont and the Hills and the Valleys")

whether my doubts, I heard  
more than one praise  
the terrible simplicity of the simple,  
that one can absorb  
the charged possibility of stones and hills  
or, afterwards, smell manure straight  
in the invisible summer air.

I can agree that maybe somewhere  
our eyes, also becoming fossiled as in  
a great glacier's staid motion,  
once could have entered the life of  
bare wood. That would have happened  
in the very moment of its incessant  
spectacular passing.

Most of us finger truths in flash particles.  
They doubly twist elsewhere,  
dots on a quantum dance-stage filled with  
dizzy starts and slick  
good-byes--an endless dash here and there.  
Thus we believe in no true truths.  
whatever we touch only might have been.

Can't we go further and say that our lives  
reduce to porcelain flutes of energy?  
we wait for an end that never finds us in  
a state of pure agog.  
Rather, we walk streets in a world where  
passing cries are disguised in the way quaint-  
colored leaves make us miss the trees.

### After Reading Spinoza

I've seen mountain men with a need to live  
and kill, their long beards  
threatening us with primal fear, all  
as they work to deny their fee for not being.

Yes, none of it is fun, not least those  
stressed ruptures occurring while  
we strive to secure  
simple, bare relief from grim negations.

Clear mirrors can almost reflect  
the valence of summer surges and plain trees,  
but we still miss mornings when  
the confirmation of nothing returns.

Should we instead hunt caves for secret genesis,  
lose count of things, forget to want  
protection from falling into random ravines or  
looking for the prevention of rain?

Sure, sometimes standing on thresholds of  
grief, some of us touch a velvet end.  
We stop feeling we're wise and not like geese  
of passage over snow-blasted terrain.

Maybe someday we can accept how  
the irrational becomes irrational again: as  
when elves play havoc with  
the mind's iron claws attempting to resist pain.

I hear shouts to be this or that and try to  
hold off single pivots of perception. Mine would  
deny any photo except that showing me  
content with violet wings, folded in as I fly.

## Agoraphilia versus Its Discontent

### 1

Public: the tightest of bonds from  
the beginning,  
the perpetual search for the fond eye,

You throw yourself at  
the outside face  
read novels on the public beach.

But soon enough it subsides.

why recline on Sistine sands,  
later sashay with crowds near the brine and  
re-enter all the trysts?

### 2

The tides flow back from summer strands.  
Elsewhere, you can always sense the odd awe  
as at a private lunch.

One night, two of us, surrounded by corn,  
witnessed a barn owl's huge, white wings  
suddenly come down and engulf our car.

who else would notice this assault on being?

We continued to drive through  
the calm smell of that dark Iowa field.  
Later, thanks to wine, we gossiped with others.

## Black Omens and Mud Daubers

"Crow, feeling his brain slip,  
finds his every feather the fossil of a murder."  
--Ted Hughes, Crow

He wrote of crows  
the strong, vile bleak version inside  
ourselves, too split  
confused and bruised to know it was  
cruising below sight

But did he know the average kind  
those free from restraint  
the indifferent ones often lined up  
on an upper branch  
watching, waiting for the next something

Yes, they race each other for  
waste until their hearts look for  
one more hue of black  
In fact, before metaphor  
they strain our sense of the dumb

Yet, the opposite of saints  
they can gauge us with  
their insouciant stares, even  
pinpoint our depths  
perhaps right to our very us

who can't hear them caw in almost words  
How dare we think  
they don't hold seminars in death  
Don't they daily play the carrion card as  
they go for remains of the night

A few also seem to know  
our names, I swear can spot us looking  
straight and hard with  
a single, weird yellow eye that  
can eye our scars

So they're not like  
egregious raptors that might  
seize our faces with  
cold, craven claws, and then return to  
shine black against January snow

No, they're far from icy sages of sorrow  
They're more like resilient wasps in

foul summer grounds that  
fade into what for them is either old age  
or the heat of their own stings

### A Friendly warning

It takes years before we're victims,  
quacking like ducks  
yanked out of summer pools like  
stuffed cloth things, ham-fisted dolls  
unable to float anymore because  
recalled thunders weigh us down.

Believe what you want  
but there are no second chances,  
no curtain calls for fowls or fools.  
Pay attention, please. Learn to  
forget that we too lately  
followed furtive clues about why.

## Dancing in the Dark II

They dance, they go up and down,  
they seem wild, run hard towards wanting  
a flickering fame fueled by  
electro-brawn. After all, they sense  
they'll never die, and the goal  
is joy. How much further can they go?

For me, a few lights once flashed on floors,  
then went out, now just gauzy tropes.  
Do our early bursts of limb ever come back,  
say as messages found in sea-smashed bottles on  
some remote beach where one could  
at least hope for the repetition of hope?

Mater Nostra, Pater Nostrum

Satellites search the skies.  
Down here, there's clay and  
my friend's aged body stays in pain,  
her bones, shards like chipped wood that  
none of us can see.

A woman who spoke first and last,  
she believed in flows and knelt all hours  
in spite of daily shadows.  
She wrote about how earth breathes  
and switches on the lights.

As for old men, they once had firm arms,  
for many the better to kill others  
thanks to contraptions they'd invented to  
win or else to lose. Only later  
did some of them try to play pipes profound.

I wish things were different from  
these quixotic series of payoffs, the thin  
lines of health, the surprising  
collisions with not me's.  
Their brute strokes befog absolutes.

Our fathers and mothers proclaim  
we're not in heaven. The future is where  
we live in the past even as,  
again and again, a present generates  
more accidents of certitude.

### Some Words on Poe's Secret Writing

"The soul is a cipher, in the sense of a cryptograph and the shorter a cryptograph is, the more difficulty there is in its comprehension."

--Edgar Allan Poe

Right from the start  
he worked in earnest to trick others.  
His later take was that he  
shouldn't ever try, but he still did.

Acting askance, he asked, in essence, why  
can't adolescence go on and on  
and serious, odd seasons  
not begin again and again and not stop?

There are those who insist on the answer.  
They hate the none, which made for  
the one question that aroused him on late-night  
strides on strange streets.

Early on, he'd learned the illogic of  
a language that led to abysses.  
Even when he strangled words to become art,  
they simply would cease to

mean what readers thought they did.  
He wrote tales in which people like birds  
had little eyes yet stared back.  
His visions thus didn't die, but instead

turned into blocks of blown pasts,  
stars repeating trailing their gone fires,  
a million chances in a million--with  
each repetition for what?

At best he would write lines with images  
that made sense despite hungover  
possibilities that clung to them in the way  
snowflakes beat on his black coat.

In the end, he couldn't hibernate like a bear.  
He thought to face how we always have  
the capacity to lose.  
After all, what was left to know except that

life came down to a history of exploding rocks?  
For him, our sun was close to having had

its day if yet a purveyor of brittle shocks--note  
his bed-ridden girl ruptured by shot lungs.

I'm sorry that his ointments of sound worked  
but as distractions from despair.  
Like Shakespeare's, he knew  
his sentences were never really there.

He failed to reach fame, only afterwards became  
a missing saint, but so what since he  
never knew, but just vanished one miasmic night,  
a lost force of the invincible small?

Lately I think of him a lot, this  
alien flâneur of crypts, I don't know why.  
Is it that we all lie so to revive  
a former passion for a buried private script?

## Little Different (Derrida)

So to speak, he came our way as a dark horse,  
 penning lots of words,  
 most bold for  
 the times. Perhaps even before then  
 he had said it all to friends: that  
 there was no "all."  
 It's not just the earth that rusts.  
 We're already marked by  
 marches from bright lights and lusts.  
 If those have their place in  
 our daily dance, they later resemble  
 some incessant, raucous brag.

In short, he split the voice in two  
 and out came  
 the hum or buzz of a fast-gone speech.  
 Like rags, messages appeared  
 found and lost, somehow  
 delivered in endless figure eights.  
 Put another way, whatever he wrote  
 gathered like clouds floating above Gaza  
 or New York. Or else it was  
 as if insights alighted from planes,  
 which we breathless relatives  
 were waiting to meet.

Like his, our biographies are therefore  
 always in flight. Tight love and thoughts of  
 who we are scatter off like summer sins.  
 Everyone comes late to the feast.  
 His genre was to tease us to  
 know all finales of becoming known, since  
 before we die, we were mere traces of  
 a here and now. So why not let scriptures  
 run sideways, as when, long ago  
 I passed faces  
 happy to hear stray sounds of  
 jazz in the now defunct Metropole Café?

A Farewell Post  
(for Dave Post)

A friend of mine recently had a stroke.  
He didn't make it through and fell to ground.  
There were no fireworks anywhere near.

Early on, we had some good talks,  
whether about the If-God,  
far-away death, jokes, another year of doom.

Afterwards he navigated photo-jets,  
plotted sites for tomorrow's bombs,  
tried to avoid fiery flak in Hanoi's nights.

Later he got re-married. They sailed a while,  
each to get beyond a traumatic strife.  
He did carpentry, drove a pickup, got hurt hands.

They lived in a Maryland by-water place.  
During empty days at home,  
now and then he'd blow his old saxophone.

No doubt he enjoyed a laugh or two with a few  
average Joe's. They had beers together,  
shared ironies, almost felt they were alike.

Still, I think he held down depth-charged things,  
not just that he'd never flown solo, but  
more, the shock of faces or a rare peace of mind.

Did his early gulp of fright have anything to do  
with his late, unexpected loss of  
useful limbs, then the slurred motion of thoughts?

I know my belated remarks might seem hyperbolic,  
but they aren't, no, not like  
starlings flying in sync making evening noise.

He himself cared less for invisible cantatas over  
seas or beneath skies; preferred fey  
black blues, sonic aches for the extinguished.

I can't yet say good-bye to his gone.  
I get it, the absurd. I just  
need more than belief in answers full of flight.

I suppose he and I once breathed the same air.  
If so, it wasn't enough. Pain sometimes poses  
something to fight before it too resists repair.

## Prayer Beneath the Evergreens

"I shall be like that tree,--I shall die  
at the top."

--Jonathan Swift

"Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh."

--Philip Larkin ("Trees Revisited")

### 1

I'm sorry, no joke, but it's what I wanted  
to stray outside the lines  
color eagles white on gray, rocky cliffs  
exhilarate at night before wars begin  
be awry, a wastrel, an outlier  
It would be after I had left the rooms and  
had read about the theology and argot  
of trees, then I'd feel  
I was definitely in the clear

### 2

And yet I ask, how might trees regard  
other trees (must we always remain in the dark?)  
do they sense them at all  
say by wind-sounds or smells of the alien  
Do they somehow appraise others  
say dislike New England pine trees given  
their uncountable duplications  
their raids, adding shadows, on vacant spaces  
in short, an unforgivable togetherness

### 3

Of course, this is anthropomorphism let loose  
a reading of growth until  
it stops, or how we too want to be based  
How else can we agree with  
the transactions of perception that  
show we never ruled the roost  
Most of us think quick, and in the process  
leave behind beautiful things because  
they happened while we talked unbound

### 4

From the go, I preferred trees, no wasteland

or if not that, then that English woman  
her up in the branches, who once wore bare legs  
before she descended to do public wars  
Oh Boudica, I know I'm old now and downward  
but come back once more unplanned  
arm my familiar springs with exploding buds  
forestall their replication  
show only whorls of the definite indefinite

### No-Name Epitaphs

You can't find them on any map,  
 they won't be there,  
 not even as specks, not even  
 a word on Google or the newest GPS.  
 And I don't have to convince you, do I,  
 there was no Tarzan  
 yelling loud and bright in some hot forest  
 or swimming in pools as if on film.

Instead, find them more like  
 former chunks of subjective space  
 or simply of a people  
 more or less lost to stories except  
 for stone-disguised tomes now in  
 thin, make-shift shacks left behind,  
 anonymous prose records of  
 past grains and selves bought and sold.

Defunct business deals go on and on.  
 What signs remain of  
 the would-be few who wondered about  
 a lion's casual, cruel eyes or  
 the wind's motion in the high grass?  
 What of their final, misplaced passion, how  
 it must have added to  
 the much later invention of zero?

## Reviews of L. Renza's Works

## General Comments:

I won't speak about his prose  
except for its possibly concealed OCD,  
an incessant quest for  
some unfound forest or  
a private bolt-hole based on  
an "I" constantly about to disappear.

What has any of that  
really anything to do with Poe or  
Stevens or (for Pete's sake)  
Sarah Orne Jewett (of all writers)?

As for his explications de textes of  
Bob Dylan songs,  
writing that way always comes across as  
a parody of an academic wish,  
for instance for a Casaubon-like key to  
mythologies (Cf. Middlemarch).  
And consider: he violates the dictum that  
they're not poems to be read on the page, say  
as in silent monasteries, but  
scripts to be sung and clapped by crowds.

Nonetheless, L.R. persists,  
keeps asking, "Or is it?" "and/or,"  
"Do we really want snow to be the same year  
after year, so that we'll  
also never know ourselves as unique?"

Too bad for these grammatical and/or  
thematic pleonasms as well.  
After all, some of Renza's readings  
might be fun to read,  
that is, until one realizes that  
he could have meant for us to take them  
as genuine safaris into  
a lost continent of obvious thought

And as for his poems, well . . .

### Reply

His M.O. consists of a few imagined mandates:

Quit quick when you sight the opaque wax  
cruising below efforts to etch  
the stunning aperçus stuck in svelte rhymes.  
They won't cure some daily ache.

Write poems with faux wisdom and  
don't care about scribbling polished sounds  
as in poem-circuits or workshops.  
Aim instead for the perishable publication.

In short, state your grasp of  
what feels like the estranged  
limbos of people you know and of  
any sighted objects passing by your window.

To relax, cut into the mask of whoever  
down deep doesn't object to  
public conventions that reject expressing  
a rock-hard there.

Keep to the style of the past imperfect,  
a quaking what was, but only  
as long as it allows you to acknowledge  
an ever-coming entropic scene.

Above all, look for subjects just then  
emptied of meaning, and so take verbal roads  
that lead to quiet even if they  
occasionally insist on how mostly nothing is.

Then  
(for Cris)

It was true, that was it,  
back then and there  
around 9:05 p.m.  
in an unexpected night when  
we might as well would live forever.  
Part of it was the usual.  
You could hear midsummer trees  
humming outside.  
I felt then  
that irreducible press towards  
the special sound of  
the surrounding loss of things  
and then, just as soon,  
the look such that there was not  
even any more  
the need for truth.

## Five Teachers in Mud Time

I had a mentor once. Towards his end and after  
past raptures of thinking,  
he would pick up sticks and bracken on  
the Virginian farm he owned.  
He walked his domain daily until  
his knees and soul were pretty much shot.  
I wonder, did he still ponder  
the Frost lines he could always recite at will?

Towards the end of my plainer years,  
I tread through words and sometimes recall  
city sidewalks where Stevens and later  
I would amble. I wonder had he found his fat girl  
there while I, young and south of  
his high ruminations, woke up near a poultry yard  
where doomed chickens gabbled away with  
their own kind of sense.

### This Is Not a Pipe II

People, mostly men, used to  
smoke pipes a lot.

The practice practically said,  
Look at me, the contemplative,  
above it all,  
I can even see us head around or  
walk away from minor minds.

Then it all fell apart.  
Pipes became passé,  
as did talk about Greek verbs and  
the vague, blue happy.

And now at night,  
invisible brown crickets dress in black  
and make excited noise,  
I don't know why.

Then the joy in air or whatever  
it was  
once again subsides.

### Generations

No truth seems to last, it multiplies  
 each time. But think of locusts. After the Bible,  
 here they come again, reproducing like  
 the last people who don't know  
 they're maybe the last people. If saints  
 disappear although not their holidays, what will  
 become of older theories about bulls?

Please note: there's always a new Jerusalem with  
 people pounding stone floors and  
 hoping old words will raise the dead.  
 The inner dark is always the main concern.  
 For instance, scared each morning,  
 we latter-day ancients try to hang tough by  
 trying to postpone the latest machines.

I still can hear grackles high in the trees.  
 They sing about sex and wind until  
 bully nightjars come and silence their concerts.  
 In some places, things even seem to remain  
 the same. Thus, I listen to the remaining songs  
 and think to tattoo an Asian apothegm:  
 "To live till you die is to live long enough."

## Late Summer Clothes

September morning-fogs that had  
already arrived last August,  
I don't know what more  
you or I can do about them this year.  
A few things pass us by,  
it happens a lot,  
but this time it seems different,  
the universe and nights  
giving us the cold shoulder.  
Back then, a thought flush with flesh  
ran the fashion show,  
a thin cover of raw tinder,  
but now, how many women do we miss  
wearing long, purple gloves?

### Importance

(Apropos Paul Celan, Zbigniew Herbert, Nellie Sachs,  
Maya Angelou, Najwan Darwish et al.)

It's hard for us not to suffer and just write.  
Being silenced not to hope, it seems  
I can only ring distant bells,  
a thin romance using words to the wise.

who can care after all those slave cabins  
machine-gassed wars, how many Jews or unknown bodies  
left in cold wood like dead flies, and now  
a politics of venom with the wild climate stuff?

By comparison, we write in the shadows with  
diffident voices and spoiled words.  
Erase them, I say (although if private deaths then  
don't matter, does that count?).

### One More Pet Cemetery

we left their melting bones in  
the backyard. We hope no one digs them up  
when we're gone. How soon before  
they become blank dust? Come to that,  
how many fleets of birds have disappeared  
eyeless in afternoons?

Besides, the later owners of the house  
will themselves turn gray  
no matter if they wake up mornings and  
run roads to keep their legs light.  
How long can they too leap high,  
then rush to slow down?

The move towards stark objection is best.  
Keep our skulls fired and lost.  
Let them sleep fast,  
become parts again of no whole. Already  
I learn from crusts of winter ice  
we always knew of what our us was us.

What Octogenarian Lust Must Be Like

“One day I’d still like to meet someone,  
say who’d won prizes for poems,  
then stand on some shore, perhaps in Maine  
where we would both toss  
our different stones into the abyss.  
There would be no thought about  
the new words or a spot that one of us  
might have found or lost,  
nor would we believe  
we were going somewhere or not.  
I mean, how could we,  
since we would have already  
earned our olden eyes?  
And we’d each know love the way it was  
once promised: as one more  
black butterfly swiftly passing in one  
single, summer-darkened evening  
while we couldn’t tell why.”

## Just the Same

I'm no jackdaw, but I've seen enough to  
know when what seems the same event  
lacks the same significance, say as  
what a dusk-dull sparrow meant  
to me last year on  
the same March day. Thus, sounds by Bach  
accidentally stray into yet  
one more Dylan song, just as the smell  
of leaves outside  
vaguely smell how they did  
when I was seven.  
But the mirror says I'm different, not  
myself. Where was  
the one that comes to me as a now  
recalled long-ago pain?  
So I don a hood, try to gut it out and  
feel not really other  
but rather more like just the same.

### The Past

Time leads us almost to forget each other.  
I imagine only in death do we forget  
this forgetting; otherwise  
we'd find ourselves phased out scene by scene.

why can't we finally drive to beaches and  
note Black Guillemots like absent friends and not  
come across them like lessened reefs nor  
a kind of wind that reminds us of last June's?

There'd be no angels there, just the white gulls.  
We could try squeezing microbes of sand to  
glass, the better to accept how we  
get erased in the manner of departing clouds.

It's enough to make one feel a crisis. It's only  
that I want to think I'll see  
a familiar face again, this time immune to disease,  
waiting for me just beyond the next dune.

## Quiet Minds

I woke up and a small bird hopped to my door  
It dashed around, beak fast to  
the ground. But it also came with a certain poise  
and made no sound.  
What does it mean to wake up mornings and  
see through the air? This bird  
pecked once or  
a little more, its slits for eyes  
alert to the core.  
Though we never stared at each other,  
it found nothing I could see,  
and so, with infinite small feet,  
at last darted back to where it started.  
I wonder, does  
it ever wonder at all or  
does it always travel all wrapped up with  
purpose, say to fly or fall  
toward what it will eat  
and make disappear?  
I closed my door after I saw it go.  
What would it mean each morning to  
meet its slight stare?  
I turned back to my room and  
tried to watch the news,  
now hardly ready to hear its rowdy noise.

## A Re-reading

I don't recall but I must have read this passage  
 rife with red vigor (I suppose it was  
 in summer) and then all but flew  
 through that singular day, challenged to live  
 humid and full as  
 a someone who was who I was.

But that was in the 1950s when  
 colored linoleum was still popular for  
 kitchen floors and  
 a sudden waft of breeze (since  
 no AC's for us back then)  
 could still remind you of marvelous realms.

Too many more than the many lives I knew  
 no longer hang around. Were they  
 inessential, as when our maybe ancestors  
 invented and then feared  
 large birds, a green Buddha, later, say,  
 a Jesus, or nowadays silver-shined Zeppelins?

In short, statements like children should be  
 seen and not heard, and never in  
 rooms packed with grim faces waiting for  
 Revelation or bust. Words guide us  
 only to where we don't need words. Why else dwell  
 upon the disappearance of last year's elms?

## Up There

I brace myself against the rise of  
sodden men. But I still  
surmise that invisible buzzards lurk  
inside high New England skies.

I calm down only when at night  
I imagine they fly in deep space, for then  
who will care about their demands for  
dead minds baked under hot suns?

Why else were they invented if not to  
attack our grass, have us  
hide from their warped beaks during  
their sudden, lethal dives?

What's above can always hurt us,  
makes for even remote eruptions  
like passions against the earth while  
we become strangers on the ground.

Best, then, to lie low, diminish sound  
and maybe watch a few  
distant stars streak and fall up there in  
a kind of irrelevant glide.

## Interstices

Around here somewhere nearby, or so I think,  
 is the end of meaning, something quiet,  
 paws in the grass, nothing  
 exciting (especially that), just lines of minutes  
 unlocked from clocks.

If I asked myself, who are you,  
 I would reply like early Pound, I don't know,  
 but I'm foursquare against  
 selling gold buttons on the streets,  
 owning land by the sea,  
 proclaiming feats made by a crowd's noise.

Thus, my cantos try to  
 bring back memos of failure, comic  
 explanations of the real,  
 scripts that spawn, splice and unravel  
 found texts with major thoughts.

I know most people would call it grand to  
 to write their epitaphs in  
 big journals for everyone to read. That's  
 their heaven, but for me  
 arctic air had arrived too soon, and then I  
 caught caught a case of cold lungs.

It's not anyone's fault that I'm someone else.  
 I don't speak loud or look to  
 examine wild thyme in glass pictures without  
 further comment. But I keep forgetting  
 how we lunge for words that don't stop.

## A New Year's Toast

Your face and mine do us no good.  
 Years ago, it would have done me some good,  
 but that's all over thanks to  
 the history of eyes. Now we see everywhere  
 the loss of joy. Metaphors snap at our brains.  
 We visit Venice through our phones.

We might as well ask if we  
 can at least witness the snow the way  
 we once saw how it inspired  
 winter's first morning grounds. That would be  
 how I once read books with more to see  
 and always less to say.

The goal now is to become newly fog-bound.  
 I swear there's thick matter  
 between us, call it a force majeure, that  
 buckles our knees, bends our vision  
 under the light shed from brief daily skies in  
 all their briefer brilliance.

Then why do I keep staring at grasslands  
 stripped of game, especially since  
 change invisibly changes them?  
 Don't we too inevitably lose luster?  
 Who I was is an afterthought minus the elation  
 when I first knew the moon.

I see now I mean to excommunicate myself from  
 the world, veto all its official whispers.  
 I've taken holy orders and become like some bronze  
 scarecrow with no halo.  
 Life flows by, which I regard as  
 an atomic river without the means to pause.

My friends keep leaving for Florida or worse.  
 Am I afraid that I've turned merely numb?  
 If you like, consider me a cold December stone.  
 We come together primed to share  
 primary noons, but then make  
 gradual moves for some secret, lamplit room.

But why shouldn't I give up and instead quaff  
 a good Medoc with friends before  
 winter and age does us in in the pale days  
 to come? Even inside my solitude,  
 I can often almost hear a kind of background  
 Gregorian hum by what must be my audience.

### Forgiveness

I left him at the train.  
 Now and then he had caught uncommon fire  
 but it was time for him to go.  
 For a while I was drawn  
 to his macabre riddles lacking clues,  
 but then he decided to  
 build a large, completely open coliseum.

Still, he had left behind a crass sarcophagus.  
 It showed a tattooed woman, at first  
 attracted like him to fripperies of mind, but  
 who no doubt later had read bleak tomes.  
 She stared at falling buildings,  
 must've lost the grip of the self-certain falcon,  
 thus learned to lip unconscious pain.

One thing for certain, then: like his spouse,  
 I think, therefore I'm not. I no longer plot  
 the dissolution of thugs who stoke  
 smokestacks and dismiss omens of negation.  
 Who cares if those disciples play at  
 death inside brass casinos?  
 For me, outside, instead, the lashings of rain.

"You Know, That Solstice"

Depression comes again,  
this time heavier than I'm used to.  
I hear the same voices  
varnished hard by repetition.

But even that doesn't do it  
since there's the promise of more to come.  
So it's not at all like the ones  
I used to bear.

Think of how gannet gulls suffer near  
the seaside if small  
ocean trout or other fowl won't be again.  
I'm sure storms brook no dancing in the rain.

What if I finally leave, say as  
on a day when people celebrate new birthdays,  
with me like an owl without wings that  
always knows how it ends?

But as one more heterogene bound by  
geometries of chaos, before I find peace  
I yet want to use verbs  
loaded with caprice and about to beget.

### The Truth about Dandelions

Last night the militant snows came,  
and today, age shows.  
Time will be when I'm not.  
I get the message,  
the drips of pain.  
Yes, some say that tomorrow  
warm rains will come.  
But now dead antlers block my path.  
Ice, days on end,  
weighs them down, with  
any former scene of fury gone.  
Instead, they remind me  
of flawed wrens that  
hang around even in January with  
a few songs.  
They wear common brown  
and prove once more that at last  
we all tend to become small.

## Old Friends

In our imagination  
we look the way we did before,  
you know, the last time,  
whenever that was.

But I check my mirror and mind  
and know we wouldn't know each other  
passing by  
on a sparse street.

Our faces are now merged with  
the tone of fall evenings when we  
waited for the spectacular, which  
was maybe only for the few.

Did our conversations at night tables  
ever change things,  
let alone our soured gaze at  
swish walkers on a Fifth-Avenue holiday?

What we leave behind  
won't become jewels for the faux kings  
or fools who will later come to  
seek shards of order in farther fields.

I had wanted to speak like one  
exception to the rule.  
I thought when I finally engaged nothing,  
I might then print my days.

But oh no, outside there's only  
the January ice-age,  
the thin, blonde air that continues to hint  
that what is was what wasn't to be.

### Birth Pains

I try to read books  
 the way I did before my long trek  
 to retirement began. For me,  
 it was to go slick and straight to thoughts  
 and not come back. It was like  
 other days when I wanted to enter empty buildings  
 hoping to find hidden halls.

I assumed then that a sliver of right insight  
 was the answer, but that was before  
 age unbelievably became age.  
 How do I go the way leaves fall in peace  
 in falls full of without will?  
 That question shines as  
 the sun keeps moving south to where I am.

Does it have to be complete obliteration?  
 At night I shiver, with the wind a foreign envoy  
 that brings me soulless news. Who can  
 relax under these heavens? Maybe a poem or two  
 can compensate us for a life lived like  
 live weeds. Or maybe, now and then, we just might  
 sight the sudden lift-off of a golden oriole.

## Allegory

“Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are!”  
--Jimmy Durante

Her letters stopped coming,  
and for a long while I thought none  
would come again. She was no  
zaftig, anyone can say that much, yet  
she could pen verses, slid by  
my door at 3 a.m., that could conjure up  
the peaceful genie. In a flush of  
style, she made me want to make more of them  
than I first thought they said.

She never told me her real name.  
For all I knew, she'd just flown in  
from Malta. But I saw right away her visits  
could lead me to want fame. The problem  
was that she kept her wit hushed within  
a hidden cache that bespoke  
indefinite space. So neither was she  
a muse or mother, nor did she  
promise excitements of some flippant fatale.

She was just all nonce, an absolute it,  
a lower-case intimate that disappeared  
whenever I called for her to charm my brow.  
She fell into the hollows of  
my minutes as I paced verandas in early spring.  
She always came as a stranger,  
or more or less like that infinitesimal snow-  
flake dissolving on a sallow bush  
that you might miss in March.

It's true I've had to suffer her absence.  
Days on end, I imagined her  
held hard in the relentless press of  
isolation with no release at hand.  
Yet just that made her great. Right then  
she would evince a hooded logic  
such as when you notice how earth has already  
converted minute items of sand into  
flashes of flickering gems.

And so I miss bad her quickened entries in  
my daily discussions about  
the usual this and that. Thus, last night  
I stumbled over a common  
piece of equipment that I had read somewhere

was meant to last forever. Someone  
 helped me up, but after I heard  
 applause for standing tall, I realized  
 she was nowhere around.

I think she comes from depths  
 a long way off. She thrives inside  
 secret closets, like those  
 kept hidden and buried in Egyptian tombs.  
 But she also might appear  
 like a silent swan on some foliage-covered  
 June river, already ready to  
 rush elsewhere before anyone can trace  
 ripples from a vanishing wake.

Then again, who doesn't ask for  
 signs of angels dropping down in the shape  
 of hope? Yes, I could always sense  
 when she returned all alive, no matter  
 she soon left me whistling in the dark.  
 I wonder if the wildfires of  
 future stars will singe her to absence.  
 Could she continue in the hot  
 galactic smoke of the permanent new?

I thought I saw her again the other day,  
 older now, leaning a little  
 to the left. I said hello as she passed me by  
 and kept on, but with a heavier step  
 than ever before. Would she turn back one  
 more time, I wanted to know? After all,  
 we had had some good times. But I knew as she  
 went down another street that to remain  
 would mean nothing to her if everything to me.

I myself know how it goes. On a long street,  
 lined at dusk with yellow leaves on  
 still warmed trees, I'll at last  
 fall to ground for real. But this time,  
 why not, she'll be all around,  
 with no retreats this time to inner sanctums.  
 And just as the pain starts to subside,  
 I alone will hear her whisper, "But  
 I can't live without you alone." Why not?